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The Lady Navigators

Edward Noble

To

Reginald A. Richardson

with kind regards & the
compliments of the Season, &

Edmund Noble

Hampstead

Christmas 1931

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THE
LADY NAVIGATORS

AND INCIDENTALLY
THE MAN WITH THE NUBBLY BROW

BY
EDWARD NOBLE

Author of "The Edge of Circumstance" and "Waves of Fate"

LONDON
S. C. BROWN, LANGHAM & COMPANY, LTD.
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The Lady Navigators

PROLOGUE AT WESTMINSTER

ONE a.m., and the House rapidly emptying. Honourable Members, clad in light dust coats and carrying papers, seeking their carriages, cabs, or, in isolated instances, throbbing motor-cars ; and, standing on the pavement of Palace Yard, quiescent amidst the moving throng, the Earl of Stafferly and the President of the Board of Trade. In the roadway his Lordship's horses champed fretfully on their curbs.

"I hear," said the Earl with a quizzical intonation, "that Lady Barraclough is determined to proceed in this matter."

"If Lady Barraclough were not your sister, Stafferly, I should be inclined to say damn Lady Barraclough," Sir Thomas announced a trifle grimly.

Lord Stafferly's intonation became a trifle more marked as he answered—

"By all means ; a dam in the family is worth a dozen out—if you spell it properly ; or, as my friend Hatcher says, 'If you want to dam the Nile, use concrete, it lasts longer.'"

"Against concrete in the abstract I have nothing to urge," Sir Thomas laughed, "but if I judge Lady Barraclough rightly, I should say a phrase would be more likely to bring her to a sense of the fitness of things than all the concrete you can hurl."

"Thanks. But if phrases were of any service, I fancy de Bleach would have conquered by this time. I hear

the air has been quite sulphurous lately at the Barrington *ménage*."

"Poor de Bleach," Sir Thomas remarked. "What will he do?"

"Anything to stop her."

"Where is she now?"

"In the Solent, I believe—practising. Pertinacity, eh, what?"

"The sort of thing we, as a Government, are deficient in—if one may believe the papers."

The two men laughed until the solemn coachman glanced round with a humorous twinkle, and drew the lash of his whip gently across the horses' backs. "Steady, lads," he soothed; "steady, then."

"Suppose they will go?" Sir Thomas inquired, again becoming serious. "Is it decided?"

"Oh yes; they will go."

"Very well; then I suggest you put them on to Brusselton, and ask him to find a good skipper . . . eh, we might be able to——"

"Brusselton—good notion. Never thought of him. Capital fellow Brusselton. Head of the Oceanic, isn't he?"

"Very much."

"Good. And, by the way, Carragh has a son in the Oceanic. Some row between them. Know nothing of the whys—only it is. Always been sorry for Carragh; only son and all that sort of thing, you know. Hum! might be able to do him a turn, eh, Hatherly?"

"Sleep on it," said Sir Thomas.

"I will. 'Um—yes. Turn it over yourself. . . . Night."

The Earl of Stafferly entered his brougham, and clattered up the Yard. Sir Thomas Hatherly called a cab, and did the same.

Big Ben boomed the quarter in the hearing of a policeman engaged in barring the gates.

PROLOGUE IN THE SOLENT

MIDNIGHT. A still breeze, and the waters of the Solent shimmering in the light of a waning moon. Midnight, and the *Firefly* shaking herself clear of her moorings, hanging out her signal-lamps, setting the watch, and presently creeping like a wraith through the maze of anchored yachts heading for the Needles.

Calshot Light gleamed on the quarter; Hurst Castle blinked solemnly right ahead, and from the bridge came the sound of a gong, a silver-throated affair, similar in resonance to the voice which had preceded it. The voice was a woman's—the final order, "Full speed, Helen," and immediately upon the signal came the deeper tones of a man. He spoke slowly, with immense importance—

"Ye did that well, ladies. I give ye only your due. I couldn't have done it bettther meself."

The ladies stood in a group on the yacht's bridge; they flooded it; took up every available position, and the Hibernian instructor appeared, in the dim light of the moon, like a chicken in a crate of hens writhing in the agony of suffocation. Yet he found opportunity for speech, craned his neck to see, and reiterated his formula as each evolution was accomplished.

A steamer swept up from the western sheen showing a red eye on the yacht's starboard bow. A tall girl crossed out of the group, and stood examining it through her glass. "Port!" she cried. Again a moment later, "Steady!" Then, as they drew across and a green eye fell into line beside the red, "Sta-arboard! Steady sta-arboard . . . so . . . let her come." It was immense.

The chicken thought so too. He struggled to make himself heard, and said, "Beautiful . . . very nicely in-deed. I couldn't have done it bettther meself—an' that's the thruth."

Silken petticoats rustled approval. The yacht swept on in conscious pride, veering and twisting to avoid the passing shipping; came down towards the Castle, crept up to it; stared at the blinking high light, sheered boldly south, rounded the Shingles and Warden Buoys, and steered in triumph past the Needles. Nothing had happened amiss. The ladies had, between them, avoided all dangers; the sea appeared for the nonce to be bare of ships, and the instructor weary of unqualified praise.

He wriggled to the front as they set the course due south, and, standing at the edge of the steering platform, expanded his chest. He was a small man, and very important. He said once more—

"Nice-ly . . . very nicely. I can teach ye no more. I'd thrust my life in your hands, ladies, as soon as kick it. Sooner. I'm not jokin'; I mane it."

"Bless the man," said a large personage, "we don't doubt it. You look too serious." She examined him up and down through a pair of starers that would have abashed an owl; but the instructor took no heed—he smiled from his perch, and went on as though nothing had happened.

"But while we're on the subject," he said, "I must remind ye that this sort is all plain sailin' and foine weather; also that there's other things to be found at say. Ye note that? Very well; I put the followin' position before you, an' I ask a solution—your solution, ladies."

He paused, and took a hasty glance around the horizon, then resumed: "You are in command av a stheamer, not a yacht, but a 5,000-ton stheamer, an' you've been through a gale av wind an' got into throuble. It's not a little, footy throuble, but a bad throuble—one that would break the heart av a shipmaster holdin' a share in the vessel. I'll enumerate them. First, your high-press cylinder cover is blown off; second, your engines are fit for the scrap-heap; third, by some onaccountable neglect av djuty on the part av your navigatin' officer, the chronometers are run dhown. That's what's happened; an' by the same token ye're just 500 miles to the west'rd of Scilly, in the thick av the traffic, an' it's snortin' up for a new gale—sou-sou-west. Whhat would you do?"

The ladies suggested several methods of escape. One said, "I should hoist sail and make for Falmouth."

Another : " I should look out for a passing steamer, and signal for a tow."

Another : " I should tell the engineer to repair the cylinder."

Another : " I should wait for the sky to clear and take lunars."

But the Hibernian instructor shook his head. " You'd just hoist three black balls on the forestay for a day signal, and three red lights in a vertical line by night, an' sthand by for God Almighty to get you out av the ugliest fix a shipmasther can find himself in. That's whhat ye'd do—all the rest is as may be, for you'd be broken dhow'n an' at the mercy av the wind an' say an' drunken colliers. That's whhat you'd be, ladies, an' it's no use blinkin' fact."

He climbed from his perch and shook foreboding to the winds, and again his voice fell soothingly across the sleeping decks—

" We're doin' nicely—very nicely. I can teach ye nothin', an' so, with your permission, I'll just go aft an' get a shmoke. Your navigation requires no halter—least av all, from me."

The yacht pulsed over the silver sea ; sought out a comfortable track ; examined the horizon for dangers, and, seeing none, swept on like a fairy, carrying her lamps for ornament.

CHAPTER I

LADY BARRACLOUGH COMES TO FENCHURCH AVENUE

They said they could do it quite well
(These ladies).
It was simply a question of striking the bell
(Dear ladies),
Of going on duty, of noting the log ;
Of watching the beauty and turning a cog ;
Of hiding the green, of showing the red,
Of breakfast and dinner and going to bed—
Which was true—with additions
(Poor ladies !)

“ I DESIRE,” said Lady Barracrough to the office at large, “to see the head of your firm on a matter of urgent business.”

Fenchurch Avenue dozed sleepily in the sunshine. There was a suspicion of somnolence about the tall buildings, standing with half-closed eyes and open mouths, as though they expected flies and it were lunch-time ; there was a suspicion of somnolence, too, in the face of the grey old clerk who advanced at the sound of the voice ; a suspicion that he waited for lunch and could do very well without the flies—could, in point of fact, do with several lunches, and had no use for the flies buzzing in a halo over the desk he had left. But Lady Barracrough saw nothing of this. She was engaged on a scheme for the betterment of Women with a capital W, and could not be expected to see difficulty, written in brevier, in the face of a clerk.

Fenchurch Avenue woke up. The blinds fluttered. The office looked its astonishment ; but the grey head bowed deferentially. It saw a lady regarding it remorselessly, through starers, and the thin lips gave an answer. They said—

"I regret, madam, that Lord Brusselton, our chairman, is not in the office . . . if it is anything that I . . . for instance, could attend——"

"I desire," the voice reiterated, "to see the head of your firm. Will you kindly oblige me by sending him my card?"

The grey form received the card; glanced at it, and bowing again, said, even more deferentially, "If you will step this way, my lady, I will despatch the commissioner for our managing director. In point of fact, Lord Brusselton is not in town; he is at present, I believe, at Mentone—and, our vice-chairman, Sir William Trickett, is—out of town; but the managing di——"

"And who," Lady Barraclough interrupted, "is your managing director?"

"Sir Walter Hoggpen."

Lady Barraclough had recourse to her starers—"Jubilee Honours?" she questioned.

The grey head sank a trifle, and the voice suggested a gasp of astonishment as the thin lips said, "We are very . . . proud of Sir Walter here. He is a great man—in the City. And, in his robes, on the occasion of which your ladyship speaks, he was considered one of the finest figures in the procession." He added as he found courage, "You may have seen his portrait—it was in the Academy the following year. Painted by one of the greatest living——"

Lady Barraclough interrupted with a gesture, "May I ask what is your rank in this establishment?"

The grey face expressed surprise, almost alarm, yet the voice replied to the question in all seriousness, "Ledger clerk, my lady."

"No—C.B. . . . D.C.L. perhaps?"

"Charles Skiffington."

"Without interest, without tag—I see. Hum!—well, there is time yet. No—I don't go to shows. Nor do I take much interest in magnates. Thank you—yes, I will wait Sir Walter's return."

The grey clerk bowed. "May I," he asked, "when sending the commissioner, mention the nature of your ladyship's business? You see, Sir Walter is at lunch . . . and——"

Lady Barraclough broke in on the deferential intona-

tion, "Of course you may. Tell Sir Walter that Lady Barraclough desires to charter a ship. And if," she added, "that does not bring your great man to see me, I shall be astonished."

The grey eyes positively blinked as the clerk bowed himself from the presence. The office woke up with a start. Fenchurch Avenue forgot that it was lunch-time; decided that revolutionary *motifs* were in the air, and, considering the heat, expressed no surprise. It winked at the sunless windows across the way, shook its blinkers, scattered the flies, and relapsed into its noonday doze. It reflected that, on the whole, vested interests were uncommon solid affairs—the buildings on every hand proclaimed the fact.

Lady Barraclough moved about the floor of a richly-furnished ante-room. On the walls were costly paintings and models representing the fleet, in different stages, from the first side-wheeler and auxiliary screw to the modern palaces of steel and steam and electric buttons. Over the Elizabethan mantelshelf was a portrait of the founder of the firm, done by a shaky artist who signed himself, "Your humble and obedient servant"; on the opposite wall was an oil-painting of Lord Brusselton, seated at a table, facing a number of bald and semi-bald gentlemen—the directors of the existing Company. It was executed by an R.A., whose fee might run into four figures. At Lord Brusselton's right hand was a water-bottle and glass. Connoisseurs said that it was a wonderful bit of light. The colour of his lordship's face and nose seemed to suggest that the artist had introduced it to balance the picture—or, in sarcasm.

Lady Barraclough paused to examine the work. She stood in the attitude known among men as straddle-legged, but among women as impossible. One hand was raised to carry her starers, the other reposed in that part of the human anatomy called "the small of the back"—only there was no small. She was bulky. Large and masculine feet supported her; a deer-stalker hat, severely undecorative, crowned her short, incurved locks; her coat was seamless, and very like a sack; the skirt of her dress "turned up" with leather.

For some minutes she remained thus, her attention fixed on the metamorphosis, the evolution of a small and

penuriously-conducted concern, depicted by an artist who signed himself "Your humble and obedient servant," to the grandiose Board Room, filled with pompous magnates, sent down to posterity by the brush of an R.A., who, following the immutable law, would presently blossom as, say, the Duke of "Guise."

Lady Barraclough's starers clinked on the button of her sac ; she clasped her hands behind, and turning on her heel, walked slowly to and fro on the rich, soft carpet.

At first sight it appeared that the story so sedulously spread by the "shipping interests" was a mere fable, and, like all history, rested on no other foundation ; but Lady Barraclough was sufficiently versed in the ways of the world to understand that, in these days, gilt-work is the trap set to capture goslings ; that if you do not shout, you will certainly be shouted down.

British shipping was in a poor way. Well—it might be so ; British shippers were badly handicapped by the American, German, and French competition ; by the subsidies paid to liners to steal our trade and make our policy a by-word. Perhaps—but meanwhile the magnates had shuffled their burden to other shoulders—the shareholders' shoulders ; and it was necessary to show something when dividends had sunk to microscopic proportions. Lady Barraclough recognised the fact ; recognised, too, that here were Lord Brusselton, Sir William Trickett, Sir Walter Hoggpen, and ten Esquires, all busily occupied directing the fortunes of a Company that once was ruled by Brusselton under that earlier cognomen of his—Brown.

Were Lady Barraclough a man, one might readily say of her that she snorted ; but how can so masculine an epithet be applied to "all that is beautiful, soft, and fair" ? Lady Barraclough resented the hypothesis to which her own argument had forced her. She moved across to a window and looked out upon Fenchurch Avenue ; the blinds, more blinker-like than ever, shivered in the breeze.

The Avenue was awake again ; the flies no longer monopolised the conversation. Lunch was over, black coats and tall hats, black jackets and straw hats came down the pavement, cigarette or toothpick in hand. The doors absorbed them, the blinkers smiled approval ; only the palpitating heat, the stuffiness, the sultriness remained unchanged.

A dapper young man with his hair parted in the centre, and wearing a grey frock coat, white waistcoat, and dazzling spats, entered the room. He advanced towards the strange, large figure with a questioning air, suggesting in a soft voice, "Lady Barraclough?"

Lady Barraclough faced him, took him in, annihilated him—"My name, sir. Are you Sir Walter Hoggpen?"

"No . . . er . . . the fact is, Sir Walter is due at a Company meeting—Cannon Street Hotel, you know—and has but a moment to spare. If you could give me the details of your requirements, I might, perhaps, be able to expedite matters. My name is Carmichael. Secretary to the Oceanic, you know."

Lady Barraclough regarded him through her starers. He appeared so dainty, so trim, so small; such a worm in her presence, that she withheld slaughter and fell back on sarcasm. "I am afraid my education is incomplete," she remarked slowly; "I presumed that by coming to the head of affairs, I should obtain what I want at once; but it seems to be as difficult to see your head, sir, as it is to obtain an audience with His Majesty."

Carmichael lifted his hands apologetically. The action suggested an acquaintance with France. He said, "I trust you will not consider it in that light. We desire always to do all we can to advance the interests of the Company, especially in the case of shareholders, but, you see, business men have so many engagements—the calls upon their time are——"

"As numerous and unwarranted as the calls they make on shareholders," Lady Barraclough interrupted. She added, smiling, "Really, you should not give yourself away in that fashion. For instance, Lord Brusselton is at Mentone. Sir William Trickett is—by the way, where is he? Oh, out of town. Sir Walter Hoggpen is due at a Company meeting at Cannon Street Hotel . . . and the other directors, where are they that they are unable to arrange a matter which will add to the Company's profit?"

Again Carmichael attempted to intervene; he lifted his hands and opened his lips, but Lady Barraclough fell upon him like an avalanche. She said very loudly, "My dear sir, will you kindly tell Sir Walter that I expect to see him, and that the sooner he can make it fit his con-

venience, the better it will be for the harmony of the next annual meeting of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company?"

Mr. Carmichael surrendered. He could do nothing else, for Lady Barraclough looked formidable enough to tackle the whole office, flies and heat notwithstanding.

She was solemnly marching the anteroom when the door presently opened and another strange form confronted her. In a moment she faced about and made an examination. "Are you Sir Walter Hoggpen?" she questioned with an accent of derision on the pronoun.

The youth suppressed a smile. "I wish I was, my lady," he replied. Then, seeing advice written in my lady's eye, added, "I am his private secretary—will you please follow?"

"Ah!" said Lady Barraclough, "then I sympathize."

They moved away at once, and crossing a passage, came to Sir Walter's room. The great man rose from his writing-table and advanced to greet the visitor. "I regret," he said, "that you should have been kept waiting. Business men have little spare time in these days. Pray be seated. I think you wish to charter a ship, Lady Barraclough—is that so?"

The managing director was large, calm, immaculate in dress, but there was about him that air of authority, of strength, that mere inches cannot give. His presence acted like a tonic on Lady Barraclough's nerves. He was the antithesis of those other scribblers whom she had already interviewed; they acted very beneficially as a foil, but on the whole she had no desire to be compelled to fence with anything less effective than the sword.

Sir Walter moved to his chair and faced her with poised finger-tips. He had the head of one born to inevitable command, no matter his grade in life—strong, square jaw; thin, straight mouth; grey, piercing eyes, and the nose of a Wellington—one of the new-type generals; a commander of industry. At his elbow was the battery through which he ordered operations; behind him were the twin scribblers, sunk in work.

Lady Barraclough calmed visibly. She replied that he had been rightly informed, and added, by way of explanation, that the vessel she desired must be one of four or five thousand tons, similar to those used by the Company in their Eastern Mail Service.

Sir Walter took down a note, asking as he wrote, "For how long?"

"Six months, with the option of an extension for a further three or six months if required."

"For a cruise, I presume?"

"Precisely. In point of fact, I desire to investigate several problems—some connected with shipping, others in the more difficult sphere of the Amelioration and Enlightenment of the Human Race, and the Divine Laws of Justice and the Rights of Women."

Sir Walter rolled his pencil across the table and touched a button on the battery. "It is rather a big order," he said: but whether he referred to the charter or to the programme did not appear. Lady Barraclough was content to accept the former, and said—

"It will, of course, be a profitable transaction for the Company."

"We are glad of all the crumbs we can find, Lady Barraclough," Sir Walter smiled. Then added, "Pardon the question—a business one, by the way—you are prepared with references?"

"Certainly. My bankers and the Earl of Stafferly."

"Thank you."

The great man turned in his chair and manipulated the battery. He spoke into a telephone; paused and gave directions to his secretary; touched a second button; said, "Osteritz—113576"; gave Carmichael instructions to receive the answer, and faced Lady Barraclough.

"On the assumption," he observed, "that the references are in order, I offer you your choice of three vessels, either of which you can see in the docks, and can be ready at twenty-four hours' notice—the *Southern Cross*, the *Atalanta*, and the *Eddystone*. The former is of 4,500 tons, and 5,000 horse power—a very fine vessel; the others are a trifle smaller. Either is at your service for the period you name—and on the usual terms."

Lady Barraclough took a paper from her pocket and placed it on the table. "I shall require the vessel on my own terms," she said, "and as set down in this document by my solicitor."

Sir Walter's face showed no change as he glanced down the pages; he examined them and gave his reply without comment—courteously. "I am sorry. No—that is im-

possible. My board would not sanction such a contract. On the usual terms."

The concluding sentence pointed Lady Barracclough's question, "On what terms would they sanction it?"

"Absolute indemnity against any kind of accident, and a sum equal to two years' gross earnings in case of loss—in addition, of course, to her value."

Lady Barracclough pursed her lips. "That is a risk that could be covered by insurance, I presume?"

"If Lloyds will accept it—yes. If not, we should require a bond."

"That could be arranged."

A bell attached to one part of the battery was ringing insistently, and Sir Walter took up a receiver. "Yes," he said. "Who are you? . . . Ah!—I am Zollverein . . . what are your terms? . . . hum, yes. Close. Confirmation shall follow." He rang off and touched a spring, then picked up a receiver, looked across at Lady Barracclough, and said, "Pardon. The conditions are unusual. I will see if they will cover," and entered gravely into a one-sided conversation with Lloyds.

The House was evidently amused; gurgling noises came through the telephone and gathered such answers as "Sporting risks . . . Lady navigators . . . See the pavement . . . How about the Union¹ . . . F.P.A.² no good. Whole hog or none . . . Try Straightjackets,³ and let me know as soon as possible."

Again he rang off and faced Lady Barracclough. "I am afraid you will think us very difficult to deal with. The fact is, your main condition runs right in the face of the Act, and we can only get cover on what underwriters term 'a sporting risk.' I fear it will cost money."

"Then the money will be found, Sir Walter, if only as an earnest of our intention to carry this affair through. The present condition of the law in all matters concerning women's advancement is so one-sided, so illogical, as to amount to a colossal iniquity, and no mere question of money shall prevent me testing the problem by actual experiment."

"In that case," the imperturbable voice replied, "I

¹ Commercial Union.

Free from Particular Average—Insurance term.

³ A firm of insurance brokers.

think you may rest assured that you can have not only the vessel you desire, but the whole fleet—at twenty-four hours' notice."

"Precisely—a question of money, not of merit."

Sir Walter looked up with his blandest smile. "I am concerned with facts as they are, Lady Barraclough, and not as they no doubt will be at some future period."

He rose from his chair and added, "We can do nothing until I hear definitely from Lloyds. But you may depend that if it is to be done, it will be fixed up within a couple of hours. I would suggest, therefore, that you see the vessels and make your choice; then call here on your return, and I will arrange that an answer as to the possibility of cover shall be in readiness. Mr. Briggs, kindly see the Lady Barraclough has every attention."

He took up his hat, bowed, and left the room; and Lady Barraclough betook herself to the docks with an order to view the ships. At four o'clock she was again at the office in Fenchurch Avenue.

Messrs. Carmichael and Briggs awaited her return. She led off at once with the announcement that she preferred the *Southern Cross*, and would be glad if the Company immediately gave orders for cleaning the windows, and would insist on the carpets being properly beaten. She took it for granted that her *bonâ-fides* were found sufficient, and inquired whether the question of insurance had been satisfactorily arranged.

Mr. Carmichael took up the burden of his afternoon's experiences. He said that there had been quite a flutter among the underwriters, and suggested that in all probability Lloyds would come down to see the vessel off. Meanwhile, as no doubt Lady Barraclough was tired, he might tell her the underwriters had decided, as a sporting risk, to accept the liability for six months at 7 per cent., and with the option of refusal or variation, at 5 per cent. for any extension of that period. They desired finally to say that they awaited Lady Barraclough's instructions in the matter.

Lady Barraclough's instructions were as precise as though she had been born and bred in the City. She turned to the Secretary, handed him the "proposal," and said, "Close."

Carmichael could only bow.

Lady Barraclough continued: "When Sir Walter Hoggpen returns from his Company meeting at Cannon Street Hotel, kindly inform him that I desire the charter-party and all matters connected with the hiring, provisioning, and itinerary, to be addressed to me in care of my solicitors. I will attend to the matter personally tomorrow."

Again Carmichael bowed, and as he recovered his equilibrium he saw that Lady Barraclough had reached the door and was on the point of opening it. He hastened to intercept her, but she passed through with a nod of indifference and came into the sunshine.

The Avenue awoke to the fact that it had been surprised; discovered, shamefacedly, that an angel had walked rough-shod where men scarcely dared to tread; expressed the opinion that possibilities lay unfolding before its old-world gaze, and shivered at the knowledge.

The blinds stirred uneasily in the breeze; the windows, half veiled and blinking in the glare, seemed to suggest that although Fenchurch Avenue was awed, it had decided covertly that it was not business.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN HARRISON EXPRESSES HIS VIEWS

THE *Southern Cross* was ready for sea.

The carpets had been beaten, the windows were clean, and the brasswork shone like a millionaire's side-board. Lady Barraclough had seen to these matters individually and collectively. In the course of these and other supervisions, Captain Harrison, the marine superintendent of the line, returned to the unregenerate language of his youth. He argued that it was unavoidable. He asserted, in his most dogmatic fashion, that under certain conditions gases generate, and it is necessary to open the safety-valve.

But the shore gang, who had the work in hand, objected. They said they were free men, and not slaves; that behind them was union, of hearts and things, and they were prepared to see Captain Harrison spontaneously combusted before they took on any of his superfluous gas. Then Captain Harrison became circumspect, tipped the foreman, and turned steam on the kid-gloved officers—persons without a union, or any other kind of spinning-jenny for cornering capital.

Ten dusty, harassing days—they might have been a year! No sleep at night—coal dust, shore dust, man dust, a perfect simoom! The officers prayed for the end of things, for the back of Captain Harrison and the eternal misery of Lady Barraclough. Her starers came to be a signal for vanishment, the sound of her footsteps the precursor of a diligent tour of inspection—in the bunks. "One never knew," they said, "when or where a fire might break out"; but to each other they acknowledged that life had its drawbacks, that it was necessary

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to practise effacement before so masterful a personage, and considered it wise to begin early—for, they argued, were they not tied to this waistless autocrat for six months, if not twelve? Ye gods!

But Harrison had an eye on eventualities also. He knew as well as most men the difficulties of the case, and at the last minute down came four officers, drafted from the unplumbed depths of a marine superintendent's pocket; and the quiet, gentlemanly, kid-gloved gentlemen were transferred to the decks of a vessel unhampered by bachelor-girls and quixotic charter-parties; while gentlemen of equal birth and standing, but of character, determination, activity, *nous*, took up the duties instead.

Captain Harrison's first move showed his quality as a leader of men. No yarns, no Gallions lunches, no irrefutable tales of this, that, or the other. Out into the river with her. Baggage on board; crew on board—good! Away to Gravesend, world's end, to get your crew sober, and no leave.

Captain Harrison took charge, and saw that his ideas were carried out; for as the new commander could not join until noon on sailing-day, he considered that no man was better equipped with reasons for silence than he was. The crew had been chosen especially to suit Lady Barraclough, and she had harangued them from the vestibule of the shipping office on the subject of the elevation of the human race. She explained to her stolid audience that mankind was steeped in a species of lethargy from which womankind, by the aid of conscience, would presently lift it skyward. She said that the *ultima thule* of all endeavour was to be lifted skyward, that to grovel or stagnate were unpardonable offences against which all should fight. The wings of freedom flapped for sailormen as well as landsmen. There were, as had long been recognised, a trilogy of methods, all of which lifted, and they might be classed—freedom of opinion, freedom of endeavour, freedom of aspiration; and the greatest of them was aspiration. She desired to bring them to the foot of that trilogy. It was a ladder they must climb—but before they could plant their feet on the first rung of it the human race must develop a conscience. Conscience, she declared, is to the human species what terrestrial magnetism is to the world at large. She thanked God that

recent years had seen a tendency—slight, she feared, but still a tendency—on the part of a Government whose action was not always stable, nor disinterested, nor logical, to acknowledge the right of the individual to judge for himself. She remembered when it had been otherwise ; but these things were sunk, never to reappear, on that day when a Government admitted that mankind, even the poorest, the most degraded, was entitled to act as his conscience dictated.

It was a supreme effort—"nobly given," said Lady Jane Vereker-Taylor, of the R.S.P.T.,¹ who, with several other ladies, had listened and marked the effect. It was "*the talk*," said one of the crew, a person with a flabby jaw and a nubbly brow ; but Harrison pronounced it suicide, prefaced by an adjective at which the historian shivers. In point of fact he expressed himself sceptical of the results. He asserted that Lady Barracrough's method of dealing with sailormen was like the new diplomacy, and erred on the side of candour, and that Lady Barracrough would be better employed in searching out the haunts of the sea-serpent. He growled consistently.

The officers looked at each other, and questioned what they had done to merit such austerity. They had all received promotion, and had gone to the expense of new uniforms ; it seemed that at the same time Harrison believed it necessary to advise them of the insecurity of their tenure. They recollected with qualms Sir William Hoggpen's dictum—"I can pick up enough officers in Fenchurch Street in ten minutes, by holding out my finger, to man the whole fleet." Remembering this, it was perhaps wisdom that prevented any one making inquiries. Incidentally, too, there was the colour of Captain Harrison's face, the lines about his mouth.

The officers said it was liver—but it was not liver ; it was bachelor-girls and the elevation of the human race, as applied to sailormen.

The *Southern Cross* was ready for sea, the blue-peter flying at the foremast said so ; so too did the blue-funnelled tug lying at a buoy close at hand, with a wire hawser sticking its nose up in the chocks. At the main was the Company's flag ; at the gaff a resplendent blue

¹ The Royal Society for the Propagation of Tulips.

ensign ; at the mizzen a silk arrangement of red and green vertical stripes, "splashed with a harp, a thistle, a rose, a comet, a crown, and a bunch of onions." If there had been further known insignia, or anything denoting blatant, undiluted anarchy, Harrison was morally certain it would have been tacked on as fringe. He added in a growling monotone for the chief officer's edification, when the thing was put out to be hoisted, that it "was an amalgam of the petticoats of the household brigade," and immediately became explosive when asked to explain its meaning.

The *Southern Cross* champed fretfully at her curb. The river smiled at her, reflecting her beauties, throwing out hints of her hidden curves and delicate lines. The wavelets tossed white beads against her blackness, and received them back with laughing *insouciance*. A tender flapped lazily from the pier shimmering in the distance and drove alongside. It brought Captain Carragh, the commander, deposited him on the gangway, sent up his luggage, and flapped drowsily back.

The marine superintendent met him at the head of the ladder with perfect sobriety. He knew what was due to himself, and to Carragh, in the presence of a quartermaster and several servants ; but they were old friends, and as they moved towards the promenade cabin Harrison's face glowed. At last he would be able to unbend, to unbosom himself of the secrets that had kept him frowning since first he came out of the board-room with Sir Walter's instructions buzzing in his ears. He objected to frowning, said it gave him dyspepsia, melancholia, and put him in bad odour with "the boys"—the thing was preposterous.

He took Carragh's hand as they stepped over the door-sill and said, "Thank God ! Honestly, another day would have finished me—another day ! Think of it."

Carragh's glance fell on the ruffled features ; he looked surprised and said, "I suppose I have something here eh ?"

Harrison nodded ; his clean-shaven face was a-pucker with moving lines.

"Right. What's your medicine ?" Carragh touched a button, and his servant emerged from the shades to ask for orders. "Whisky and seltzer, I think—eh ?"

"As a tonic," said Harrison, "I believe you can't beat it."

He sat down spread-eagled on the settee, and Carragh moved across to finger his pulse. "Seventy-five! My dear fellow, for a man of your habit it's death. What have you been doing?"

"What have I not been doing, you mean." He straightened himself against the cushions and became explanatory. "Suffering from suppressed identity, suffering from suppressed vocabulary, suppressed notions. Man, I couldn't say 'damn' but what she heard me; I couldn't signal the foreman but what she was there with her starers and her questions; I couldn't whisper to the boy but what she would be there to pick me up; couldn't flick a fly off my nose but what she wanted to know if it was a mosquito; couldn't scratch my back but she desired a particular average of the fleas that she would be compelled to take over. She's suffering from a plague of 'why.' Wants the deck hose turned on her—and if I were you, Carragh, and she started in on the same lay when you get outside, I'd do it. There's nothing like cold water for swelled heads—nothing in this world, or the next."

The tonic and glasses jingled in the doorway, whereupon Harrison relapsed into indifference and silence. Carragh dismissed the boy and took the bottle himself. "Say when," he remarked; "and if you've finished suggestion tell me who she is—also what I have to do with her."

"You'll find out soon enough," said Harrison, grimly watching the spirit—"when, my boy, when—and I hope you'll find it entertaining."

"Remember I'm only just in, and could do with a few months' leave," Carragh laughed.

"Man! you wouldn't miss it for millions. I wouldn't at your age. There's fun in it—d'ye take me?—fun. Well, here's to you and your safe return." He drank soberly and consistently, set his glass on the table, and resumed: "By the way, I should tell you that I have strained Brusselton's regulations as far as I could in the matter of collapsible boats, lifebuoys, and so forth; I've fitted a case of lozenges, chemicals, and microscopic grub of every known form in the stern-sheets of each; and, at the risk of absolute effacement, have supplied you with an affair they call a bridge-raft. It is pegged down across the smoking-room aft—you-touch-a-button-and-we-do-the-rest sort of principle. Don't believe in them myself, always

jam when it comes to business—but then I've never sailed with lunatics, and I felt there might be something in it, so I put it in. Fancy you may require it—as an experiment, of course. She pays."

The latter clause he insinuated in response to Carragh's rather startled exclamation, "She! my dear Harrison——"

"Bide a wee. Dinna be sae fast, as our friends say; I'm coming to it. . . . I'm coming to it.

"Imprimus, I'd have you remember, you've got a very fine ship. Secundus, you're openly handicapped by the devil. But, as an offset, you can take your own course, gang your own gait, and stay as long in harbour as she'll let you. Man! she's an angel to tackle; a jem—a specimen the like of which has not come my way for years. You should be able to handle her—and, incidentally, I expect to hear some good yarns when you return.

"But, as I was saying when you broke in with your absurd interruption, you're signed on to navigate the *Southern Cross* under difficulties, on a sort of go-as-you-please jaunt, on a very beneficial charter-party, looked at from the Company's point of view; and you may stay in the North Atlantic to sample the gales, or you may go south and seek out a new source for the Gulf Stream; you may take a look in at Europe, Asia, Africa, or the two Americas; or you may spend your time distributing petticoats among the ladies of the South Pacific—I canna say. I know one thing over and above all else that comes into mind, and that is that I would give a good part of the whusky I expect to consume before I coil down my ropes, for a few years . . . a few years struck off my unwieldy roster. I, myself, would take command—I would teach her the rule of the road and political economy with perfect skill—I would; trust me, I would."

He lay back, frowning and shaking his head, and became sentimental. "Eigh for the days when we were young, Carragh! Who of us would not be ready to shift the decimal point back one place? . . . not you . . . not me . . . nay, my boy, it's the only common ground on which mankind meets—yon. It's the *pons asinorum* of the human race; we're across it, but we're always hankering to get back, and would—but the hay is on our backs and the tressels are broken down behind us."

Carragh had long since given up all hope of logical instructions, and now laughed heartily at his companion's air, as he sat, shaking his head and ruffling his hair, on the settee. "What is it?" he cried; "a touch of east wind, or——"

"Impossible women, and be hanged to you," said Harrison, and then paused. A knock sounded without, and the chief officer appeared in the doorway.

"The ladies are on board, sir," he said, "and the pilot is anxious to unshackle before we swing."

Captain Carragh rose from his chair and held out his hand. "Glad to see you again, Walton . . . ladies? What ladies do you mean?"

"Passengers, I believe, Captain Carragh."

"Quite right!" Harrison interjected, springing from his reverie and patting his friend on the back. "Quite correct. Enter the ladies, exit peace. In point of fact I was under the impression I had told you. Eigh, man! but ye've got a queer lot this trip. Some female suffrage patients on a voyage to extend their horizon and pursue the problem of the descent o' man. A bonnie lot—a bonnie lot, eh, Walton? But to speak by the book, and to continue where I left off, they've chartered the ship for six months certain; with a problematical additional six on the horizon of things—and between us, you will have to do as they require."

He moved across and held the curtain aside to pass out; then added, "On the whole, I'm inclined to think you will be equal to the experience."

"Thanks. Suppose you expect to see me home again, though? No men. . . . Great Scot!"

"I think," said Harrison, with a profound nod, "that the Government would vote you a statue in the House if you could manage to jettison the lot—without scandal."

Carragh laughed outright. "Who is this damsel?" he questioned.

"Damsel! Man, she's Lady Barraclough."

"Never heard of her—what is she?"

"President of the Anti-Smoke League," said Harrison, with eyes that twitched.

"That's unpleasant, for I have some Manillas which I intend to sample."

"Chimneys, my dear boy, chimneys and the purification

of modern ether. Your 'bacca's all right ; so is hers, I dare swear—but not only that ; she's President or Secretary of every Anti going, and there are, perhaps, fifty others with her—man-haters to the last hairpin."

Captain Harrison stepped over the sill and looked back. "You will have to 'convairt' them, Carragh, or leave them with the niggers. They are a thorn in the Government's side ; we have no use for them. It's a thing you can do if I may judge from your record—you take the compliment ? We couldn't put any one in charge of such a basinful ; and, as for officers, why, I've given you the cream of the service—ask Walton."

He chuckled, dodged the curtain, put on his hat, and completed his exit. "Get into your war-paint," he cried over his shoulder, "and come out. I will introduce you."

Ten minutes later, Captain Carragh, clad, as his servant expressed it, "in full flig," made his way to the promenade and looked about for his friend. He had no occasion to search. Captain Harrison stood near the forward binnacle, his sturdy legs well apart and his top hat tilted into the nape of his neck. Confronting him were several ladies in mannish coats, deer-stalker hats, and binoculars. It was evident that Harrison had his back to the wall, and as Carragh approached he heard him say—

"The matter is in the hands of the commander, ladies. I decline to interfere in the just prerogatives of a British ship-master. He will act as he considers fit—having an eye, I am sure, not only on the Company's interests, but on his own and yours. Hah ! here he is—Lady Barraclough, allow me to present Commander Patrick Carragh, R.N.R., Captain of the *Southern Cross*."

Lady Barraclough stepped forward and bowed in acknowledgment of Carragh's salute. She appeared very angry, and broke in without preface, "I desire to know, sir, whether it is usual for the crew of this vessel to walk about the decks without their shirts ; and, if so, whether you can see your way to interdict a practice which, if it became a custom, would not only shock persons of fastidious tastes, but might also be conducive of a general laxity of discipline and a loss of moral tone ?"

Carragh looked his astonishment and faced the marine superintendent. Harrison's reply came in a series of

explosions—"Fireman—up from stokehold—looking for sweat-rag—black as a nigger."

Lady Barraclough turned to one of her companions, a girl dressed in dark blue yachting kit and wearing a Tam-o'-Shanter pinned lightly on her pretty brown hair. "Was the man a negro, Guffles?" she questioned in hollow tones.

"Certainly not. If he had been it would have been different."

"Precisely," Harrison interjected, with solemn eyes.

"I should perhaps have said," Miss Guffles smiled, "that apparently the man was white; though, strictly speaking, piebald would be the description most in accordance with fact."

"Miss Guffles is Secretary of the Royal Society for the Verification of Scandals, of which I am President," said Lady Barraclough in dignified explanation. "And, I might add, I am quite prepared to substantiate her statement, if it is necessary. Further, if, as Miss Guffles says, the man had been a negro, one could have overlooked it, but a white man's skin is so blatant—besides, when you think of it, he is a member of a civilised community, a person who has had the benefit of a Christian education, whose mother, no doubt, inculcated in him the principles of sobriety, decency, and orthodoxy from his earliest——"

Lady Barraclough paused with a gasp of dismay and lifted her starers. Then suddenly facing about, cried, "Girls! look the other way—the person is returning."

On the lower deck a fireman, streaked like a zebra with coal and sweat, blatantly carried his shirt round his neck as a muffler. He was whistling and quite at his ease. Captain Carragh called to a quartermaster. "Go and tell that man to get down below at once," he ordered.

Lady Barraclough faced him indignantly. "This is scandalous!" she cried.

"In the original sense of the Greek, I admit it. It is our first stumbling-block."

Two of the ladies smiled approval and Lady Barraclough turned very red. "I use the word in the sense accepted by people of the twentieth century, and I must request you to have this person sent on shore."

"If I adopted your advice, Lady Barraclough, there would be no firemen left in an hour."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that his comrades would go out on strike."

Lady Barraclough was obviously unprepared for this; she looked from one to another, then said, "Do you tell me that your authority here is not absolute?"

"Within certain limitations—yes."

"But this is an essential. It is a question of discipline. A captain is surely omnipotent in all such matters."

"A captain, nowadays, Lady Barraclough, has to keep an eye on a good many things beside his ship. There are the newspapers, the agitators, the trades unions. Why, if I ventured to dismiss that man, there would be questions asked in the House to-morrow; and the papers would hold me up for untold brutality—a position from which I should have to retire with my directors' opinion written on a slip of paper. No, we must be *suaviter in modo*, *fortiter in re*, these days, with a vengeance—or, in other words, if you decide to dismiss a man, give him the option of getting drunk, then drop on him like a thousand of bricks."

Lady Barraclough looked more shocked than before. "A monstrous doctrine," she interjected; "a travesty of justice—one can scarcely believe you mean precisely what your words imply."

Carragh took the case from another point of view. "I think," he said, "that if you will consent to leave the matter in my hands you will have no cause for further annoyance. The man is one of the slaves of the lamp; a genie, one of the black watch. The place he works in is like a furnace; he faces a furnace; smokes his pipe beside it—for our comfort and a trifle of three pounds ten a month he does this. They are all *sans culottes* down there."

"Do you mean that literally, Captain Carragh?"

"Bare-buff is the term generally used, Lady Barraclough."

"Then it is a matter to which I shall devote my attention, sir. Indeed, I am sure we have already discovered a very serious scandal. Guffles, kindly take a note of the captain's statements."

They strolled away towards the deck-house lounges, and Harrison turned to his friend. "*Sans culottes*—bare-buff; an extremely liberal translation. Man! did you see her face? It was a study, yon. Never mind," he went

on ; "you got out of it very creditably. I thought I had the right man. Good. Turn her nose on the injustice, the cheeseparing, the anomalies ; show her the sweat-boxes, the tanks that do duty for ships ; the rotten bunks, the stinking fo'c'sles—and I vow you'll go down to posterity not only as the saviour of sailormen, but as the saviour of womanhood. Man ! but she's got her points, yon." He broke off, and his voice touched the old note. "Pah ! what am I talking about ? It's our bread and butter. What can you expect from a nation that believes in Free Trade, except competition ? It's our bread and butter. Keep her nose on the grindstone—she's a superfluity . . . just a superfluity."

Harrison paused, fumbled in his coat pocket, slapped his breast, and found a telegram.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "I have a wire for you—forwarded from some place in Berkshire. I meant to have given it to you earlier ; however, there it is."

He stood by while Carragh opened and read it, watching his face with a keen glance.

"Well," he said, "what is it ? More idiocy, eh ?"

"Rank nonsense. Listen . . . Oh, hang it, is it for me ?" He turned to the superscription and answered the question by reading aloud, 'Captain Carragh, c/o Zollverein, London.' Yes, that's me, right enough ; but what on earth is the meaning of it ? Hear this—

" ' Meant to call on you *re* tulips, but unable to make time. For goodness sake destroy theory or the bulbs. Climate Ulanda horrible. Pardon request from stranger. Matter serious, or would not trouble you. Pray move circumspectly, but stop her.

" ' DE BLEACH.' "

"Ulanda, tulips—stop her ! Who in the world is the ass speaking of, and who is de Bleach, and what have I to do with either ?"

"Part of the programme, I expect," Harrison chuckled. "Let me see."

Carragh passed the wire, and the two men stood solemnly staring at the words.

"It's lunacy," said Carragh. "Did you by any chance ship a few strait-jackets ?"

"Devil the one !" Harrison announced.

"Then you had better forward a case to Dover or Plymouth. I will arrange to pick them up."

"My boy," said Harrison, "dinna be sae fast. There's fun in it—and no strait-jackets. Play your cards—play them, as he says, circumspectly—and as for the . . . Well, well, we live and lairn, as our friends say, we live and lairn."

With a hasty handshake and a flourish of his hat in the direction of the ladies, he turned on his heel and came to the gangway.

"Goodbye, old chap," he said. "Goodbye, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

The tender received him. It struck foam out of the old river, backed astern, dipped its greasy flag, and disappeared in the direction of the hazy pier, lying behind the masts and sails at the head of the Reach.

Ten minutes later, with a long warning note on her heavy whistle, the *Southern Cross* hauled down the blue-peter and struck out for the open sea.

Carragh ascended the bridge ladder and stared at the women gathered in groups beneath him, but the telegram burned in his pocket. "Stop her, but move circumspectly," it said. True. But who was he to stop—and when? He threw the question to the winds and talked with the pilot.

On the lower deck Lady Barraclough puzzled a moment also. Captain Carragh," she mused. "Carragh—Carragh . . . Yes, I know the name—but——"

A barge approached the ship's beam, coming full for the midship section ; then, when it seemed she must strike instantly, turned on her heel with a vast fluttering of canvas, and bobbed out of danger. The incident struck Lady Barraclough as risky. It also drove from her mind the question that had occupied it. She searched the river with her starers.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN RAMSDEN

"I UNDERSTAND," said Lady Barraclough as they rounded the buoy at the foot of the Reach, "that a pilot is in charge until we get outside. Is he responsible for damage in case of collision, and if so, for what amount?"

She propounded the question with the gravity of an Opposition legislator asking information of a hard-hearted Government. She stood, notebook and pencil in hand, before Captain Carragh, obviously on the path of an irregularity, and ready to take down his answer if, on consideration, it seemed worth while.

Carragh replied verbatim. "A pilot is in charge until we reach Dover, but I am responsible, and he is liable, to a certain extent, for damage."

"Ah!" said Lady Barraclough, and set to work with her notebook. She looked up after a minute. "That seems to be a rather anomalous position, Captain Carragh?"

"I admit it, Lady Barraclough."

"And to what extent is he liable?"

"About £100, I believe."

"Ridiculous! And you?"

"I have no money liability. I get what is generally known as 'the sack.'"

"Expressive, but very vulgar." She added after a momentary silence, "On what ground is so anomalous a position continued?"

"Well, you see, there is a *tertium quid*—the lawyers must live. If you make one man directly responsible there can be no argument, and you hurt the *tertium quid*—he has no reason for existence; but if you dovetail the

responsibility between two individuals there is always the possibility of a nice little quarrel."

"What an interesting state of affairs. And do the insurance companies pay for damages?"

"If they are compelled. But we do not insure; it is too expensive."

"Then if you do damage your Company pays, I presume?"

"If the other man has a long purse and is likely to fight, unquestionably we pay."

"Disgraceful!"

"Not at all, Lady Barraclough. Human nature and the survival of the fittest," Carragh laughed.

"Human acquisitiveness and the doctrine of oppression," Lady Barraclough retorted. Then, lifting her starers, she faced her companion. "I was aware, to a certain extent, of the anomalous nature of your position during a pilot's tenure, and for that reason decided not to take over the command until we reach the point at which he disembarks. If you will give me notice when that occurs, I will make arrangements with Captain Ramsden——"

Carragh stared. He said tentatively, "Captain Ramsden! Pardon. I was under the impression that your party consisted entirely of ladies."

Lady Barraclough waved her starers. "Pray don't make use of that most objectionable term, Captain. It annoys me. Indeed, I know of nothing more calculated to annoy me than that. Ladies, forsooth! Everybody is a lady in these terrible days. We, at all events, desire no higher attribute than woman."

Carragh scarcely knew whether to frown or to laugh; on the whole it seemed politic to accept her on her own terms, so he said—

"Please consider the word cancelled, and, if I should be so forgetful as to make use of it again, remember convention. You were saying that Captain Ramsden is——"

"My friend, and one of the most delightful women. In fact, she is the President of the Royal Society of Women Navigators, and pledged——"

Carragh's face was a study. He desired above all things the opportunity for laughter; but as Lady Barraclough paused, he became aware of the fact that she was searching him with her starers, looking for the smile he

felt was struggling for expression. He took himself rigidly in hand, frowned, and said—

"Pardon. I did not know there was such a Society. How very odd."

"Odd, Captain Carragh? May I ask in what way?"

Captain Carragh bowed. He said very suavely, "My provoking ignorance, of course. You see," he explained, as Lady Barraclough still paused, "one is so much away; so many things go on; we only hear of them when we come home—or, as now, by chance."

"True—true. But am I to understand that you are ignorant of the terms of our charter-party?"

"I know nothing, Lady Barraclough, except that I am appointed to the command of the *Southern Cross*. You see, I only got in from China yesterday—haven't even been to the office."

Lady Barraclough fumed up and down the deck, taking short, quick strides. "What haphazard management," she complained. "Really, it is too provoking."

"In any case the charter has nothing to do with me. That sort of thing is always drawn up in the office."

"So it appears. Well, sir, then I must explain." She halted and stood pointing down the deck towards a group of girls, some of whom were dressed in blue yachting suits with gold-laced sleeves, and cheeky little caps perched boldly on their shining hair, and said, "Do you see those women, Captain Carragh?"

Captain Carragh signified that he certainly did see them. He might have added that they appeared both graceful and pretty; girls, in point of fact, and the very antithesis of the personage at his side. But the grim intonation of Lady Barraclough's voice effectually barred all notion of badinage as she followed with her explanation.

"They are some of our officers. Captain Ramsden and her chief, Sadie Cole, are downstairs running out their sailing orders. They are qualified navigators in all except the name. The Board of Trade refuse to grant them certificates; refuse to allow them to sit for examination. The thing is an injustice; it strikes at the roots of woman's progress; and it is to force the Government's hand, to compel them to acknowledge the equality of woman in this matter, as in others, that we have chartered the *Southern Cross*."

Lady Barraclough paused, and Carragh faced her very gravely.

"But surely," he interjected, "you do not propose to navigate the vessel yourselves?"

"And why not, sir?"

"Well—you see, I am in command."

Lady Barraclough smiled. She seemed to brush aside the suggestion; to pass over it as though it had never been made. She said, in her grating voice—

"Captain Ramsden assumes control as soon as the pilot leaves; and from that time, since the Board of Trade insists on your presence, I must ask you and your officers to consider yourselves our guests."

Captain Carragh had long outgrown any feeling of commonplace astonishment, but this made him gasp. The situation, for which Harrison's wandering rigmarole had scarcely prepared him, opened certainly in the way of fun; still, it was a sort of fun in which he was unable to indulge; it was, apparently, in the nature of a joke—a huge and elaborate practical joke which might end in any known species of disaster. He felt that the time had come when he must assert himself, or consent to grovel for ever at the feet of this autocrat who sought to usurp his authority. He faced Lady Barraclough, and said very gravely—

"Thanks for your invitation, but I cannot accept it. You must know that it is impossible. I am commander of this ship, and am prepared, with the assistance of my officers, to navigate her where you desire during the existence of the charter-party. I cannot delegate my responsibility, therefore, you must understand, I cannot delegate my authority; indeed, if you consider the matter, you will see that such a course would be impossible, the position absurd."

"Precisely similar to your present position with the pilot, Captain Carragh."

"You have me there, Lady Barraclough; but even you will not argue that because the law forces my nose to the grindstone in one quarter I should keep it there when I am free."

Lady Barraclough smiled. It was rather a grim, uncompromising kind of smile, holding out very little suggestion of acquiescence. She produced a paper, unfolded it, and held it towards him.

"I like your pertinacity," she said; "but if you will read that I fancy you will find that I have not overstated my case."

Carragh took the document in hand and glanced it through. He found it was the counterpart of an agreement by which the *Southern Cross* was chartered, and that it bound the Company, under certain penalties, to lease the ship to Lady Barraclough. But the clause which struck him with astonishment ran to more purpose. It said, in effect, that in consideration of Lady Barraclough having indemnified the Company against all loss in case of accident arising out of the unusual conditions, or against any penalties the Board of Trade might see fit to impose owing to these conditions, the Company admitted the right of Lady Barraclough to appoint navigating officers from among the ladies of her party; and delegated the working of the ship to her, unconditionally, for the space of six months certain, to go where and how Lady Barraclough decided; to any ports in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, or to any island or continent within the latitude 60° North and 60° South.

Carragh read to the end, then looked up and said, "I must consult with my chief officer. Will you allow me to take this with me?"

"Certainly."

He moved away at once, and called Walton to his room. Perhaps half an hour later he returned, and found Lady Barraclough still walking slowly to and fro awaiting him.

"It appears to be quite in order," he said; "there is but one omission—I have not been advised. To put myself right with my directors, I have decided to telegraph from Southend for definite instructions from my board. You see," he continued, noting Lady Barraclough's smile, "if anything happened, and I had no direct authorisation, I should unquestionably be broken. I admit the charter-party, but I have not been to the office, and Harrison certainly did not mention it."

"You are quite right. I don't blame you; I blame your office. How long will this detain us?"

"Not five minutes. I will signal for a boat as we approach, and have the answer forwarded to Dover. We dare not stay here all night, the risk is too great."

"The risk. Pray what risk is there?"

"By the time you and your friends have been as long navigating as I have you will recognise that if you wish to run in safety you will avoid all coasts, keep outside all harbours, and never enter a river unless you are compelled. Under those conditions a sailor may live to be an old man—not otherwise."

The ship steamed onward under the guidance of her officers and the pilot, came in sight of Southend, hoisted a string of flags, and slowed off the pier. Then a waterman splashed alongside, accepted his mission, and headed shorewards, while the ship resumed her journey.

She swept past the mudbanks and entered the labyrinth of shoals that choke the estuary. She rounded buoys that danced in the swell, and buoys that clanged out warnings; swept past buoys with cages, triangles, globes, all labelled and coloured by some versatile artist who believed in contrast and had no notion of order; past buoys that blinked a wan light at the radiant day, like candles left by a careless housemaid long after the sun had risen, and shamedly confessing the obliquity; past ships, schooners, barges, steamers—an endless and ever-varying panorama, until the white cliffs crept in upon them, and Dover Harbour lay close at hand.

The pier signal-station had something to say as they slowed to put the pilot ashore; and it said it, with scandalous brevity, on the flags—"Proceed. Charter-party correct. Zollverein." But Harrison had been more thoughtful, and when the boatman came alongside he sent up a message for the captain; a wire, thumb-marked and grimy from its sojourn in the man's dog-eared cap. Carragh opened it and read as follows—

"Hoggpen has wired instructions Lloyds. Quite right. Give her her head. We accept responsibility. By the way—forgot to mention—I put case of patent waistcoats on board, each guaranteed to float an ox. Serve them out.

"HARRISON. Marine Superintendent."

Carragh passed the telegram to the chief officer. "What d'you think of that?" he questioned, laughing.

"It exonerates us, sir," said Walton. "Better wire back to insure our dunnage."^{*}

"It's mountebank work. For two pins I would anchor and send in my resignation." Carragh fumed. "No—I make no promises. Look after the ship. I must see Lady Barraclough."

The chief officer whistled. "It seems to me," he observed to the bridge at large, "that we are in for no end of a spree, if only the old man will keep his wool cool." He faced about and became preternaturally austere as he spoke to the quartermaster. "Starboard there! Starboard! Mr. Rathbone, go ahead a stroke on the engines. So—that will do. Don't allow her to fall off again."

Captain Carragh crossed the promenade and came to a group of ladies. They said, afterwards, that they thought he was going to snap their heads off, and were astonished to find that he only desired to know where Lady Barraclough had gone. A girl with bright eyes and golden hair replied that she was downstairs, and volunteered to find her.

Carragh moved away and stood near the break of the promenade debating this problem he was called upon to solve. Hoggpen had given his orders brusquely—too brusquely; Harrison had supplemented them by a telegram which sought to palliate the offence—any one could see that. Palliate! How could that mend the situation? It smarmed it over, glossed it—nothing more. As captain he was answerable not only to Harrison, Hoggpen, and the Board of Trade, but to the world at large—the world of ships. It was an impossible condition. No matter how this asinine charter-party was worded, nothing could alter the prosaic fact that if things went awry, if these women navigators, man-haters, and experimentalists played the fool and sank something, he alone would have to face the music. He had no desire to face music of such a kind. He would resign. He told himself there was no other logical course, and that the result of it would be that the Company would require his permanent resignation. Well—he was not in the position of some poor devils, bound by an owner's nod. The thing was absurd . . . idiotic . . . he had no patience to consider——"

"Captain Carragh!"

^{*} Personal effects.

The voice grated on his ear and he turned about to see two ladies approaching from the saloon entrance. The one, tall, of no particular shape, and with face-lines that coincided with the lines of her hat-brim ; the other, tall too, perhaps a trifle taller, without mannish boots, mannish hat, or mannish airs ; without sallow cheeks and in-turned locks becoming grey—but graceful, bright-eyed, laughing, radiant—a vision of youth ; a vision evolving slowly from the mist of years. Eyes he recognised, lips, face, hair——

He stepped forward incredulous, and heard, far back in his head, a voice saying, "Miss Ramsden . . . Violet Ramsden . . . I beg your pardon . . . er . . . did you happen to come home from Calcutta in the *Rajah* . . . five, no, seven years ago ?"

The vision smiled. It said, with a nod of recognition—"Yes . . . but you need not give away my age."

"And I taught you how to hold the sextant . . . and take stars . . . and things——"

He was standing bareheaded before her, holding the hand she had extended, oblivious of Lady Barraclough's rather chilly gaze ; oblivious of the group of interested watchers—mindful only of that clear-cut face, those sparkling eyes, the maze of crowding memories. The vision withdrew her hand and said, "Of course . . . and we called you Paddy—how quaint !"

"Quaint ! and we made you one of our quarter-masters," he laughed outright ; then the autocrat interposed with a sobering sentence, "Captain Carragh."

The note recalled him to the present ; to the affairs of a modern steamship halting between the piers under Dover Cliffs and waiting for orders. He faced about and said, "Quite so. That is to say—I believe I had some message to deliver, but, to my shame, it nearly slipped my memory." He drew himself up and continued in a new key, "The fact is, I am more than half inclined to resign. I was not aware of the nature of the duties I am expected to fulfil, and, to be precise, I find them irksome. I feel there are some positions in which men and women cannot work together—cannot be expected to work together . . . and——"

"Oh ! don't say that. Why, I remember, on the *Rajah* you told me there was only one thing that made sea-life endurable—and that was the presence of women."

Lady Barraclough glanced from one to the other. She saw at once that the girl had spoken without a moment's consideration ; but she saw also something less definite, a note, a suggestion, a far-away thrill in that clear young voice that spoke volumes. It rang in her ears like a knell, and she faced the author of all this pothier with a sarcastic inflection which was intentional.

"I agree with you, sir. There are some positions in which men and women cannot work together. I suggest that you make your desire to resign—a fact."

"Oh ! but surely that is unnecessary ?" Miss Ramsden interposed ; "besides, it is so much easier to work with friends than with strangers."

"Lady Barraclough seems to think otherwise," Carragh smiled.

"Lady Barraclough has no intention of arguing the matter," said that personage, and turned to walk up and down the deck.

Carragh looked up. Miss Ramsden did not quail ; on the contrary, she appeared anxious to compensate him for her companion's unveiled hostility. She said again, "Is it necessary ?"

"You are to supplant me. I shall be the laughing-stock of the four continents," he objected.

She watched him with a lurking smile. "Do you think so ? I'm sorry." Then after a pause, "How could one guess ?"

"It was impossible—of course."

"Still, I don't think it need be a question for resignation, Captain Carragh."


"Don't you ?" he laughed. "I do."

"Oh ! in that way—well, why not ? Besides, if I remember you rightly, I think it would be beneficial."

"That's unkind, but it certainly is true—still——"

Lady Barraclough filled the gap. She came up and placed her hand on her friend's shoulder. "Only children and fools speak the truth, my dear," she remarked with the nearest approach to a smile Carragh had yet seen. "As a medicine I agree that it is sometimes beneficial, but as a corrective, more or less hazardous."

Miss Ramsden became very red and said, "I was thinking aloud. I fear I had gone back to the dear old *Rajah* days . . . and——"



"Speech, my dear," Lady Barraclough snapped, "was given to man to enable him to conceal his thoughts."

"But the position was so unexpected. Who could have dreamt that I, for instance, would meet Pad—Captain Carragh—and perhaps jeopardise his career? I don't wish to jeopardise his career. It is a new point of view. One did not contemplate it."

"I fail to see where the danger comes in," said Lady Barraclough, "if Captain Carragh resigns."

"Oh, well . . . of course . . ." Miss Ramsden began, then broke off as suddenly as she had commenced.

Carragh watched her. Listened to the clear, thrilling voice, and fancied he detected a note of anxiety in the halting explanation, and at once the balance fell on the side of acquiescence. He argued that if he resigned another man would be appointed; and, who knows? perhaps there might come a time when these lady navigators, these strong-minded women who looked so graceful, so fragile, and incompetent to deal with the sea in some of its moods, might require assistance. Miss Ramsden, or, as the name throbbed on the chords of remembrance, Violet Ramsden, especially might find herself in need of aid—and then, if he had resigned, who would there be that he could trust? Mapleson, perhaps, or, Judge—even, at a venture, Walton? The thought annoyed him. He could not trust Walton—besides, Lady Barraclough evidently would be glad to see his back. That idea clinched the matter. He turned to face Miss Ramsden, and said, "You will not jeopardise my career; or, if Lady Barraclough likes it better, I accept the risk."

"Magnanimity," replied the head of many Leagues with a scarcely-veiled sneer, "is frequently a question of just succumbing to the inevitable. In this case you could do nothing else, except land your Company in damages."

The harsh voice grated unpleasantly, but Carragh refused to take offence; he was face to face with Violet Ramsden, and her eyes plainly expressed vexation. "If you are prepared to take over the command," he said, "I am ready to act as adviser, pilot, or whatever it is the charter stipulates."

"Very well, sir. Then we take you at your word," Lady Barraclough announced.

Miss Ramsden appeared relieved and tried to put the

matter more gently. "It's awfully good of you to say so," she remarked ; then added, "Yes—as soon as you like. I have set my heart on the experiment."

Carragh made no response. He moved towards the bridge ladder at once, and, leading the way, crossed the gratings to speak to Walton.

The chief listened with a preternaturally grave aspect, saluted and approached the third officer, who stood near the binnacle. "Mr. Rathbone," he said aloud, "call the bo'sun." Under his breath he went on, "The she-dragon takes charge. We are in for a high old time."

Captain Carragh standing momentarily alone, gazed into the distance and said softly, "I'm an ass . . . but, Good Lord ! she called me Paddy !"

CHAPTER IV

CAPTAIN RAMSDEN READS HERSELF IN

"**S**TAND by, below ! Man in the chains there, Guffles."

A clear feminine voice sounded over the quiet decks with the resonance of a high-pitched bell. It came from Miss Ramsden, standing with a pair of binoculars in hand, behind the dodger. A quartermaster waiting near the wheelhouse to pass messages, looked down at the bo'sun and winked. The bo'sun assumed an air of monstrous gravity and said, "Pippins." A second voice, less clear and a trifle strained, reiterated the orders, "Granger !" it said, "ring up the engines and send for the boatswain."

Helen Granger, a dainty figure clad in a blue, tailor-made gown with gold-laced sleeves, put the telegraph at "stand by" and lifting a silver whistle to her lips, blew a single blast.

Jenks, the bo'sun, a tall man with one arm held at his side as though he carried it in a sling, advanced across the bridge, and said, on his call,¹ "T-whit." His face was solemn, inexpressive ; he might have been a mute.

"Will you kindly place a man in the chains, boatswain," said Miss Granger, "and send the crew to stations."

The bo'sun saluted and replied with immense gusto, "Aye, aye, miss," threw in an apologetic, "mum," and backed towards the ladder. Half way thither Lady Barraclough's voice called him to attention.

"When you speak to either of the officers, boatswain, recollect that they stand here with the authority of your

¹ The bo'sun's whistle is technically known as a call.

Company, and desire to be addressed in the usual way—do you understand?”

“Very good, lady. I’ll——”

“Stay!” cried Lady Barraclough; “there are no ladies here.”

“I’d like to meet the chap as said so—if I wouldn’t put a head on him, Lumme!” said the bo’sun, then paused in some confusion, touched his cap, and added to Miss Ramsden, “that is to say, if ’twere a chap.”

Miss Ramsden looked into the man’s face, her lips twitched, and a small dimple showed in either cheek. “How do you address Captain Carragh and his officers when you receive orders from them?” she questioned lamely.

“Mostly,” said the bo’sun, “we come to the ’tention, salutes, an’ says, “Aye, aye, sir—perhaps—very good, sir—depends on circumstances.”

“I see. Very well. Answer us in the same way.”

“Aye, aye, sir, very good, sir,” said the bo’sun and turned on his heel. Lady Barraclough followed him to the promenade.

“Evidently,” Miss Ramsden remarked as she passed the third officer, “the circumstances strike him favourably.”

But the bo’sun moved slowly down the ladder, dangling his arm, and said, “That clears the hair. Sir’s the word, an’ may the Lord look sideways on me if I call any of ’em out of their names.” Arrived at a safe distance he became explosive and took refuge in his whistle.

“T-whit!” it said. And from different ambuscades on the lower deck came answering “T-whits,” then a pair of bo’sun’s mates, trim and with compressed faces, climbed the ladder and replied, “Sir.”

Jenks appeared distressed; he growled out, “Pipe, my sons. All hands on deck. Spifflicate the mud’ook—jerry-build the man-t’gall’n-m’s’t, an’ go to stations. “He winked expressively at his subordinates and the trio passed down the promenade trilling in unison until the bo’sun’s voice fell upon the note and drowned it, “Hall ’ands! Hall ’ands!” he cried. “Hanchor stations.”

He muttered in his throat as the men ran past him, “Fandango around there! Move yourselves an’ no lip! . . . Pick up the appalling anchor an’ stick it in the till of

the cap'n's shaving-box. Briggs! Starboard watch aft . . . One hand in the chains! Lively's the word."

Lady Barraclough clasped her hands behind her back and watched with an air of supreme content. "An eccentric man," she remarked to no one in particular. "A most eccentric man, and versed in order-giving; but what a voice . . . the voice of an autocrat. Ramsden is doing very well—but she lacks lung-power; lacks it as do the majority of our sex."

"Starboard helm! Slow ahead. What water have you?"

Again the clear, bell-like tones rang out from the bridge above, and the hoarse song of the man in the chains gave point to its weakness.

"And a half nine!"

The juxtaposition of sounds was comic. The one so delicate, so fragile and piercing; the other like the roar of a sea-lion lashing amidst the spume at the edge of the Farralleones. But Lady Barraclough did not smile; her lips took a longer and deeper line as she resumed her argument.

"We must train for tone—we must train for tone; otherwise we are handicapped—hopelessly handicapped." She mounted the bridge ladder and stood watching the vanishing landscape.

The *Southern Cross* stole away from the heights; crept hazardingly across the bows of a cargo boat panting up Channel with a string of flags on the bridge halliards, and a smoky halo smothering her passage; swept up into the eye of what wind there was, and settled down on her course for Dungeness.

Night was fast approaching, but the west still shimmered with a glorious northern twilight. Far over the hills and blue-white cliffs a purple haze crept softly seaward. It came from the land like a filmy drapery, and spread its folds across the gleaming Channel, as a mother spreads a coverlet over her child at night. Behind it lay the Folkestone Leas, Sandgate, Hythe, and the barren promontory ending with the shingly beach of Dungeness; before it was the moving Channel traffic—ships, steamers, smacks, colliers: manned and half-manned; watchful and careless; asleep, awake, all pulsing on one track up or down; from headland to lightship, from lightship to head-

land—a veritable Piccadilly cumbered by the fleets of all nations.

Miss Ramsden walked about the bridge calmly giving her orders ; two other officers, Sydney Guffles and Lucy Patterson, the second and sixth respectively, marched abreast of the wheelhouse, watching the compass and the steering. They had learned their lesson well. Each carried a signal telescope and wore white gloves. They looked dainty and trim as yachtsmen on the pier at Cowes, and wore their frills with similar precision. They took their cue, their attitude, their diction from the Hibernian egoist who had acted to them in the capacity of coach during those happy days in the Solent.

"The art of sailing-ship navigation," said that gentleman, "lies in a clean pair of heels, taut stays, and no flummery ; but the art of steamship navigation is less involved, and consists of attention to the four L's,¹ plus a trifle in the way of holystoning, scrubbing, and saluting. Especially," he insisted prior to putting them through their last drill, "especially remember the saluting. On a steamer of any capacity the commander would as soon eat his breakfast with a bath towel round his neck as come on the bridge without saluting. It is the pivot on which all a steamer's mechanism hangs, an' you mustn't forget it. 'Eight bells by the sun, sorr,' says the chief with a salute. 'Very good, sir, make it,' says the commander with another. Chief turns to the navigator. 'Mr. Evans,' he says, 'the commander's compliments, an' you can make it.' Mr. Evans looks across at his junior an' salutes. 'Make it,' he says. Junior turns to quartermaster, salutes, an' says, 'Make it.' Then quartermaster walks across to the main bell, an' looks at the bhoys standing there with the lanyard in hand. He lifts his hand to his cap. 'Make it, ye little divil,' he says ; 'an' away an' fetch me my tommy.' No, ladies," the egoist concluded, "you may safely omit a knowledge of thrimming sail, holystoning, or even scrubbing—but be nails on the saluting. That with the four L's should carry you anywhere."

And there is no question but that the ladies had adopted his advice. If Miss Ramsden gave an order, Miss Guffles acknowledged it with a salute ; when Lucy Patterson had

¹ Lead, log, latitude, lookout.

occasion to pass the word, she stood with hand uplifted, a very martinet for discipline and rigorous courtesy. Even Lady Barraclough admitted the necessity. "For," she observed, "if we desire other persons to respect us, we must respect them." But the quartermaster who passed messages said that he had ricked his neck with answering, and would be unwisely grateful for eight bells, or, at a pinch, the end of the world.

Meanwhile, as that event tarried, Lady Barraclough remained a silent and absorbed spectator of all that passed, and mentally plumed herself on the manner in which Miss Ramsden avoided the difficulties with which her path was strewn. Dover signal-station is a point at which the Channel traffic converges, and on this evening there were a large number of vessels in the vicinity; still they were all passed, sometimes by sheer luck, sometimes by sheer audacity; but the *Southern Cross* was safe, and presently put on the course which was to lead them past Dungeness and onward to the *Royal Sovereign*.^{*}

Lady Barraclough made her way to the bridge, and, taking a chair, beckoned her friend to join her.

"I have been thinking," she remarked, "of the one thing we have forgotten to train for."

Miss Ramsden looked her regret, and the autocrat resumed.

"Our voices, my dear, are not what they should be. I have noticed before that a man has more influence over his dog or horse than the majority of women have, and, I confess, I have been inclined to question my observation. But it was correct, and now I understand. Our voices are too musical; we speak in our heads, they use their lungs. It is the result, of course, of centuries of oppression and compelled subserviency to these lords of Creation of ours, but we lack tone, volume, intensity in consequence—we lack it, and have done nothing to regain our loss."

Miss Ramsden smiled. "Oh," she said, "I feared it was something far more serious. Well—we must practise."

"To practise here and to have been practised in the Solent, on Guffles' yacht, are two different affairs."

"Still, if *you* noticed it, the lack must be very evident."

^{*} A lightship south of Bexhill.

"It was. Did you hear the bo'sun's shout?" Lady Barraclough questioned. "That was a wonderful exhibition of lung-power, and the men acknowledged it. 'Move yourselves!' he said. 'Fandango around there!' What he meant is not precisely evident, but it is a word to remember, for the crew obeyed like magic. We must train. We must train. . . . By the way, you mean to read yourself in, of course?"

"In my own terms—yes. I looked up the naval formula, but it does not seem quite appropriate."

"Tong—tong—tong!" said the bridge telegraph from the crow's nest, "tong—tong."

Lady Barraclough started. "What is the meaning of that clatter?" she cried.

"One of the telegraphs," said Miss Ramsden. "Which was it, Sydney?"

Miss Guffles was flitting about among the instruments, seeking to discover which had spoken, when the "nest," having received no answer, said again, "Tong—tong—tong—tong—tong," accentuating the urgency by strenuous notation.

The quartermaster slipped from the helm to the wheel-house window and interjected, "Beg pardon, miss, lookout telegraph. Wessel dead ahead—close."

Miss Ramsden took her binoculars and examined the horizon. A faint white smudge loomed directly in their path, and before any order had been given a red flare shone out, most theatrically pointing the fact of a presence. In the glare a puny fishing-boat climbed into prominence. Her sails and rigging stood out in visible disorder; she appeared, in that sudden and unholy light, to be within hailing distance, almost under foot. Miss Ramsden crossed to the wheelhouse. "Starboard—hard!" she said.

The steam steering gear buzzed; the great vessel swept over four points, and immediately another flare shot out in the direction they were approaching—then another and another. The horizon danced with red fires.

"Steady!" cried Miss Ramsden. "Steady port!"

She stood perfectly still, cool apparently, but with nerves strung like steel at this phantasmagoric display; this ebullition of demon lights from an horizon and sea as dark and impassive as a pit. Twenty signals danced

within the radius of a semicircle ahead, and a wheezy gasp came from one near at hand. The gong tong-tonged vigorously.

"Port!" said Miss Ramsden. "Ring the engines 'Stand by,' Guffles."

"What is it?" Lady Barraclough questioned, approaching the wheelhouse in some anxiety.

"Fishin' fleet, my lady. No end to 'em."

"Half speed! Steady helm!" said Miss Ramsden. "Blow our whistle there, quartermaster."

Some flares died out, but others sprang up in their place. Black shadows drifted slowly into being, loomed hugely prominent, and disappeared. Shouts came out of the void; angry swear-words, trumpet-blasts. The noises mingled with the drone of roaring fires and the hollow lap of waves falling in a track that no longer drowned their volume. Then the siren took the scale with a ridiculous interval; a chromatic barbarism that sent a shiver through Lady Barraclough's sensitive ears.

"Pandemonium," she remarked indignantly. "Ramsden, I think perhaps we should be wise to summon Captain Carragh. It appears . . . unusual."

"Think so?"

"I'm sure of it," Lady Barraclough urged, as a derisive howl came from a boat close at hand. "My dear, send for the captain."

Miss Ramsden appeared indifferent. She clenched her small, firm mouth, and said, "Steady port! . . . Full speed."

Lady Barraclough gasped, and fell back on the wheelhouse oracle. "Do you often meet this sort of thing?" she articulated, as the siren bubbled and went to sleep.

"Oh yes, me lady. P'raps a dozen times a night—in Channel." He winked covertly, then added, "We generally give 'em a rocket or two. Makes 'em sit up an' show themselves."

"Show themselves!" Lady Barraclough gasped; "why, what in the world are they doing now?"

"Playin' hide-an'-seek. There's a dozen for every one you see. Full speed an' a bunch o' rockets is their med'cine."

Lady Barraclough crossed to her friend just as the gong began to splutter more voluble information in hieroglyphics. "Tong—tong—tong—tong—tong—tong—tong."

stared mistily on their starboard quarter. They proceeded thus for some twelve minutes ; then the quartermaster approached with his reading, and the *Southern Cross* swept back into the teeth of the wind, heading for the *Sovereign*.¹

At 10.40 this was passed, and at 11 matters had assumed so somnolent an aspect that Lady Barraclough decided to go below. She considered they were now well and prosperously started on their voyage, and as it was essential that she should be able to study the different questions by daylight, she rose to go to her room. She passed down the bridge ladder after exchanging a word of congratulation with her friend, and arrived at the saloon entrance just as Captain Carragh emerged. He paused when he saw the grim figure, and would have retreated, but Lady Barraclough held him with her finger. She spoke triumphantly.

"That was a brilliant display just now," she suggested.

"Which?" the commander asked.

"The pyrotechnic flares, of course."

"Ah, yes. Perhaps you are right ; but, on the whole, I fancied the other was more picturesque."

Lady Barraclough made no long halt. She decided, mentally, that Captain Carragh was as jealous as a policeman in love with a pretty cook. She went downstairs, despatched a steward to find her maid, while Carragh, his pipe comfortably alight, strolled to the forward end of the promenade and stood watching their progress.

The *Southern Cross* moved on, tossing a fiery streak into the darkness that shimmered and dwindled in the mists far astern, like the track of a meteor blazing in a moonless sky. A soft westerly breeze sung in the rigging overhead ; the tramp of the watch came up to him where he leaned. Snatches of their talk drifted across his ears. They laughed, criticised, marvelled at the dexterity of the new skipper, spoke of the "she-dragon" as a new species of womanhood.

Captain Carragh admitted the fact. She was new. But the others—Violet Ramsden and her friends—they were not new. He had met the type before, scores of them, coming to and from India, China, Japan, Australia—no, they were not new ; they were very human, especially Violet Ramsden. Her voice sounded as he leaned across the rail, "Do you see that light, Guffles?" A common-

¹ A lightship.

place question ; yet he writhed to think she was struggling with duties that rightly were his, that she would try her eyes, get crow's-feet, and spoil her freshness with anxiety.

He told himself that a gale was brewing out there in the hazy distance ; that before they were clear of the Channel it would be upon them from the west—perhaps sou'-west, with rain and brine enough to blind a sea-urchin. He questioned what would be their tactics, how they would face it, or whether they would run for shelter. And ever and anon the clear young voice crept in upon his wonderings—"Starboard . . . Port . . . What do you make of that light, Sydney ?" It was a wonderful voice—musical, full of inflections.

Midnight. A heavy bell on the break of the fo'c's'le tolled four double strokes ; then came the cry of the look-out high aloft, "Lights bright and all's well !" and, following instantly, Miss Guffles' silver whistle.

The bo'sun's mate rose from his place on the lower deck and gave the answer on his "call"—"T-whit," and crossed the promenade to reach the bridge. Miss Ramsden met him and gave him her order, "When the watch is mustered, come to the bridge and let me know."

The words were distinctly audible, and Carragh leaned back to wonder what in the world would happen next. The bo'sun's mate passed him ; the lines of waiting men broke up, and they came tumbling up the ladder to reform again on the promenade. Then the roll was called, and the senior bo'sun's mate climbed to make his report, "All present, sir."

"Thank you. Keep them waiting. I wish to speak to them."

The voice thrilled in Carragh's ears—the voice of that girl-friend of his who had come home in the *Rajah* years ago from Calcutta—the same tones, the same precise diction, the same self-reliance. "I wish to speak to them." It sounded like a suggestion, but command lay behind the phrase.

Miss Ramsden came to the foot of the ladder, and a gleam of light fell upon her from the window. She appeared calm and radiant ; her gloved hands were crossed to hold the binoculars she had been using.

"Men," she began, "I don't propose to keep you long, but I desire your attention.

"Years ago it was the rule for every British shipmaster to read himself in on attaining command, but the fashion has passed into abeyance in the rush of modern days. I wish to revive it—not only because it is picturesque, but because I consider it is likely to prove a bond between master and men.

"I, therefore, give you due notice that, by the will of God, I, Violet Ramsden, Master Mariner in all except the name, do hereby take charge of this vessel, the *Southern Cross*, together with your souls and bodies; to have and to hold for the space of six months certain, on a cruise which shall extend and proceed as I will, in whatsoever waters or on whatsoever coasts I desire, between the latitudes 60° North and 60° South.

"And I give you to understand that discipline and quick obedience will be required and exacted of you in the fullest sense of the word; and that, under the power of the King's grant, I, Violet Ramsden am duly appointed to control and order all evolutions, and to control and order all such leaves, junketings, and pleasures as I may deem fit and convenient; and that, failing due obedience from all and sundry, I, acting as aforesaid, on the King's behoof, elect to deal as it seems best with such recalcitrants as may attempt to annoy our harmony.

"Thus I take you in charge, to guard and to order—I to command, you to obey; and I pray that the God of Ages may see fit to direct my efforts for the common weal."

She paused, took one step back, halted, and said—

"Dismiss! Bo'sun, pipe all hands, splice the main-brace."

She saluted, turned about, and stood to watch the men file past. It struck her they all appeared very bulky—fat, indeed, about the chest—but the pipes rose and fell on the soft west wind; the men crept by so obviously impressed by the novel ceremony that the notion escaped, and she moved towards the ladder. As she gripped the rail Captain Carragh joined her.

"What a quaint mixture!" he said. "Where did you hear it?"

"I never heard it . . . it is a concoction of my own—a blend, you know, of fancy and the navy of Marryat's day."

"Imaginative—imaginative as of old," he laughed; "but what about the King's grant?"

"Figure of speech," she returned, smiling; "it impresses."

"It impressed me," he acknowledged.

"Really? What nonsense!" Then, with a sudden desire to change the subject, she added, "I suppose this is one of the oddest voyages you have ever commenced?"

Carragh looked up. It had dawned upon him as she spoke that the enigmatical telegram still remained unexplained, and that it was more than possible that Miss Ramsden might be able to aid him.

"Talking about odd experiences," he replied, evading the matter directly in hand, "do you know whether either of your friends is named de Bleach, or anything approaching it?"

"De Bleach? No. . . . Wait. Yes, I know the name. Is it Lord de Bleach?"

"No. As far as I understand it, it is a woman."

"Obviously they can't be the same person, then. Why?"

"I don't know that I need bother you about it any farther. The name struck me as odd, that's all."

"It is odd," she returned. Then, as he made no further allusion to the matter, she pointed lightly towards the distant Straits and said, "How do you think we got on back there?"

"Hazardously," he replied, suddenly grave.

"D'you think so?"

"My heart was in my mouth, Miss Ramsden."

"So was mine. . . . S-h-h-h! I didn't mean to acknowledge that, even to you. Please forget it."

"I wish I could," he returned. Then after a moment's pause he glanced up again and said, "Do you know what happened just now?"

"Back there? No. What?"

"You cut up the last chap's nets. Forty pounds won't cover his loss."

"Captain Carragh!" The voice quivered with pain. She put out her hand and touched his arm. "Oh, nonsense! You are laughing at me." Then again, as he shook his head, "Are you sure?"

"You heard the engines stop!" he questioned very gently.

"Yes. I thought it was Lucy Patterson's carelessness; she is such a dear little butterfly. I am afraid I snubbed her."

"So I gathered, but the engineer tells me it was nets."

She stood before him tapping the deck with her foot. "And you allowed me to go away and leave him? You would not tell me?" Her voice thrilled. "I did not think you would stand on your dignity in that way. . . . I——"

He stumbled into the gap with a hasty protest. "Pardon. It was difficult. You had just started. I did not care to point out your mistake so soon. Life was not in danger, and you can compensate him at any time. Besides, how could I blame you?"

"Not if it were necessary?" she flashed.

"It would be difficult," he repeated.

CHAPTER V

THE QUARTERMASTER WHO LOUNGED

THE night had become blurred, indefinite, greasy. There was a suggestion of fog in the still dawn ; no wind stirred, and an oily heave rolled up from an horizon no eye could discover. Everywhere were the signals of changing conditions ; the wavelets curled back upon themselves, slapped the crests of an undriven swell, and died in a fizzle of airy spume ; inky blotches of smoke lay about in the stagnant air, as though a giant cuttlefish had been engaged in defending its life during repeated encounters. Overhead the stars were brilliant, but they faded to a dull red perhaps 10° above the horizon. The clouds were banking. A sultry stillness brooded over the ship, and from the quiet decks came touches, speaking vividly of the gathering gloom.

Some one yawned ; the silence took up the sound and magnified it a thousandfold ; the bell was struck, its intonation rolled about the deck as though it were a new and monstrous species of sounding-board ; the water fell back from the bows, sparkling, iridescent, full of latent fire, as though the smooth prow were a hand smeared with phosphorus, a portion of which each wavelet filched.

Four bells. Two o'clock. "Lights bright and all's well !" The cry rilled as though the ship had suddenly developed a new echo and was proud of it. A quartermaster came to relieve the wheel, laden with information. His voice droned in the semicircular room like a muffled drum.

"Goin' to ketch it," he remarked ; "it's breezin' up good outside. Lay you a bob to a tin o' mustard there'll be oilskins knockin' about this time to-morra."

"As if I didn't know that," said his chum. "S. 72° W., my son, an' see you keep her straight. W're's the old man?"

"On the promenade, doin' a doss in his chair, seemin'ly. Got his weather eye open, though. Saw me pass, an' told me to give you the tip where he was. How are they doin' out there?" He nodded towards the ladies controlling affairs on the bridge.

"Oh, so-so. Know a bit an' think they know the lot. There's ships all over the shop—dozens of 'em; but we don't see anythin'. It's greasy; that's why. Now, sposin' this here lady skipper has to be roused out of her pew,¹ same as any other skipper, who's goin' to do it, an' how?"

"You will, w'en it's your turn; me w'en it's mine. Why not?"

"I'm a married man," said the quartermaster, twisting the wheel zealously; "I'd raver not."

"Then call her maid."

"It's the same thing. I'm not a flunkey."

"Then . . . Oh, go away an' bag your head, or ask some other Johnny to do it for you."

"I will," said the quartermaster who steered.

He resigned control, said again "S. 72° W.," and lounged against the flag lockers beneath the window. His friend stood twirling the small wheel with deft ease—hither, thither, this way, that—and the ship obeyed like a boat. He appeared profoundly engrossed with his duties, but his tongue ran on without pause.

"Seems to me," he said, "we shall be wantin' our lifebelts. You'd best go an' get your patent weskit."

"Patent what?"

"Weskit. The old man served 'em out a while ago; says they'll float a bull. I've got mine on; so's all hands, bar you. Don't know about the floatin', but it costs nix, an' is as warm as they make 'em. Better go an' get one."

"Right," said the quartermaster who lounged, but he did not move.

"Rum go, this," his friend resumed, with a preliminary chuckle that might have been a groan; "'minds me of when I was in the *Gloxinia* runnin' to Noo York. Hope it'll turn out ditto—on'y for us this time. How? I'll tell

¹ Bed.

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you. We're carryin' out a crowd ; same old anti-cafoozalem dust-carts dressed in petticoats. Same old lay. . . . What lay ? Oh, you're looney, you are. Course. We all know about that, Mr. bloomin' lawyer."

The quartermaster who lounged looked up with a grin. "Well, an' if I am—what then ?"

"Nothin'. Keep your hair on. But, as I'm sayin', it's the same sort—on'y they are goin' a step farther. Our lot cleared out at Noo York. They'd got their tips an' went West on a spoutin' tour ; all but one, an' she stopped behind. Couldn't get quit of the ship. She was one of them as cawn't get married because of the pawcity of chaps, old age havin' took her in the 'air w'ile she's waitin'. So she chucks over her party an' ships back in the *Glorinia*. Never says a word, though—quiet as thought ; just watches the bridge same as if she's trainin' for quartermaster, an' trots to an' fro the west'rd. Winter, summer, spring, autumn—never a break ; books for the round voyage, always in the *Glorinia*.

"Got a fancy for sailors—that's what's wrong with her. S'posed to have had a lover once that was a sailor ; was to have bin married to him—so I've heard. Anyhow, 'ere she is, a reg'lar perambulin' judy-show crossin' the Pond, an' never so much as winkin' at a soul. Sea-sick ? No, she weren't sea-sick. She's man-sick—not one—the whole lot—orficers, of course. Never see such a set-out."

"Tong—tong—tong," said the gong outside.

The quartermaster who steered craned his neck over the binnacle. "Told you so," he broke in. "Light dead a'ead an' the petticoats dreamin' it's the muffin man. Wot d'ye 'spect ?"

"Port ! Port !" cried a high-pitched voice.

"Port it is, sir," came from the quartermaster.

The wheel spun round. Farther aft, in an engine-room, a small set of pistons bobbed furiously under the eye of a greaser, who viewed their antics with complacent pride ; farther still, beneath the half-round, a huge quadrant carrying an oily chain groaned heavily towards the side and stopped with a creak. The ship's head flew over. A voice on the bridge said, "Steady," and again the pistons bobbed, the quadrant groaned, pulsed a trifle this way, a trifle that, and finally came to rest amidships, while the quartermaster who steered fell back on his argument.

"Knew it," he said. "Near enough, too, if it comes to that. Greasy as you make 'em. Better get that weskit I spoke of. No? Well, that's your biz.

"Anyway, here's this old gell—Judy, we called her—crossin' to an' fro the west'rd in duds I wouldn't be seen dead in. Tired of her life, they say; waitin' to peg out. Well, her chawnce came along one day. We're outward bound an' goin' into a reg'lar smoker—wes'-nor'-wes'; clean over the funnels every dive. Worst gale I mind on the Pond, an' I made up my mind that night to go South Spainin' again, for, sez I, if it comes to drownin'—w'y, it's easier drownin' in water that's warm than cold. What I want to do when it comes to that is to die straight, not curled up like a minnow in a bucket of malt. Cold! Lord, it was cold enough to freeze a brass monkey, an' I with the sixth orficer are on the conning bridge, aft.

"It come on to three o'clock—night's as black as your hat—when I hear a queer kind o' sob down along. I looked acrost at the sixth. He's standin' beside the compass, beard froze solid, holdin' on to his perch like grim death to a mop-stick. Tain't him. He's watchin' the card. He signs with his hand—a touch starb'd. I gave the signal an' looked down. There's somethin' lyin' beside the weather ladder. Looks like a coil of rope, sack of shakings—anythin'; but I can't quit, no more can the sixth. We're both lashed, an' pretty nigh dead with cold.

"At eight bells the relief come up an' take hold of things—me an' the sixth climb down; lee ladder, you can bet, for the sea's just sweepin' the weather side—slosh-oh! Nothing can live there and keep whole; but I remember the sack, an' says I, 'Sir,' I sez, 'there's something fast on that weather ladder. It'll make a purchase for the sea an' sweep it away. Better look to it,' I says. 'Oh, blues!' he says, 'that's rot.' 'Maybe,' says I; 'anyway, it's there still.' So we crept round, got a rope about us, an' edged over to the weather ladder. Judy's there, got her arms round it . . . wet to the bone . . . stone cold . . . stiff.

"No, she weren't bashed—just perished like a minnow—nothin' else."

The quartermaster who lounged smalmed at a window and said, "Dotty!" with the air of a man engaged in a far-away mental discussion.

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The quartermaster who steered said, "P'raps ; but it's all right dottiness for the oficers."

The quartermaster who lounged questioned, "Oh, how's that?" still with an air of supreme unconcern.

"Well, you see, she's sent in her checks. Can't cross the Pond no more—leastways, not that Pond ; an' so she's got no further use for 'er coin. Settled it on the oficers—every red. Bloomin' selfish, I call it."

"Thick. An' you found her?"

"Aye, an' I found her. . . . Buttered up the sixth best, though," said the quartermaster who steered. "Seemin'ly knew he's married. Knew he's got a matter of six kids, one for every stripe he'd missed. Left them a pot o' money ; him to get the int'rest w'ile he lived."

"Uz though he'd want it after," said the quartermaster who lounged.

"Twenty thousan', though," said the quartermaster who steered ; "thousan' apiece to the others. Nice little barra-full. Knew 'em all by name . . . but knew sixth's wife. Mentioned it. Lef' her a locket with 'er hair—zif she wanted that. . . . Knew about his pay, too, an' made it a condition he took no more trips in liners at £6 a month, but stayed at home to keep the house warm."

"I reckon he stayed," said the quartermaster who lounged.

"Bloomin' fool if he didn't," said the quartermaster who steered.

A figure crossed the bridge and stood before the wheel-house raising her pince-nez. It was Miss Lilian Roberts, the fourth officer, and after a moment of indecision she cried out sharply—

"Quartermaster ! call the captain. Tell him it's becoming hazy."

The quartermaster saluted. "Which one, sir?" he questioned.

"Captain Ramsden."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, I'd raver not."

"Why?"

"Because, sir, I 'ave a conscientious subjection."

Miss Roberts stared, commenced to expostulate, found no argument, and finally decided to consult her companion. As she moved away the quartermaster who steered chuckled and said—

"Got a wot?"

"Conscientious subjection."

"Objection, I s'pose. Well, who's he?"

The quartermaster who lounged appeared mollified, and replied without hesitation—

"A man who has a conscientious subjection to doin' anythin' may do nothin' provided he conscientiously subjects; an' a man who conscientiously subjects to doin' nothin' may do anythin', providin' he conscientiously subjects—see? S'pose I'm ordered to go aloft an' I don't want to smut my kit? All right; I can 'ave a conscientious subjection, an' no one can force me. They passed a Hact a while back. It's law. Very well, I have a subjection to callin' female skippers."

The quartermaster who steered revolved the matter as he twisted the wheel, and said, "Good old sea-lawyer;" then added satirically, "Go an' get that weskit I spoke about. You'll want it."

There was latent sarcasm in the remark, but the man who lounged did not appear to notice it. He shifted from one leg to the other and stared out of the window; but the window was blurred, he could not see. He argued to himself that it was all one, and proceeded to examine his conduct with the eye of self-complacency.

The quartermaster who steered reiterated his remark, "Go an' get that . . ." and broke suddenly into a whisper. "See that steamer? Call the skipper—quick!"

The quartermaster who lounged sprang upright, glanced through the door, and disappeared. A moment later Miss Roberts came to the open window. She held a note-book in her hand, and was making an entry. "If I understand you rightly," she said, "you have a conscientious objection to obeying my order; may I ask on what grounds?"

"Moses!" cried the quartermaster who steered; "see that steamer, missy?"

"Never mind the steamer, my man; answer my question," said Miss Roberts tartly.

"He's gone to call the skipper," said the quartermaster who steered. "He's gone, missy, to——"

"Sir," said Miss Roberts.

"Sir," said the quartermaster; "an' do you, in a manner o' speakin', see that steamer?" He asked the

question again, reiterating the words with mournful persistence.

"Never mind the steamer; the chief officer will look after that," said Miss Roberts, and glanced into the compass. "Starboard to your course," she added, stamping on the deck.

"Starboard! O Lord! Missy—beg pardin, sir—if I starb'd we'll 'it 'im square in the ribs."

"Starboard, quartermaster!" said Miss Roberts peremptorily.

The quartermaster groaned. He glanced out of the window and saw the green and masthead lamps of a steamer at the danger angle, a little before the beam. He glanced also at the compass. In his anxiety to avoid the chance of a collision he found he had edged away, and was two points to the northward of his course. To bring her back now was, he considered, equivalent to suicide. He stammered out—

"Beg pardon, sir . . . can't do it . . . it's——"

"It's mutiny," said Miss Roberts severely.

"Call it what you like, missy . . . put it down as blank m—m—m—mutiny," said the quartermaster with unnatural emphasis; "but c—c—call the cap'n . . . for the love of God, call the . . . the——" he broke off, then cried out with a sudden burst of inspiration, "Sir—I have a conscientious objection to starboardin' my hellum . . . can't do it for sour apples."

Miss Roberts raised her pince-nez and opened her note-book. "Of course," she said, "that alters the case substantially. Yet, I am not prepared to say that it may not be an extremely hazardous precedent. Then, again," still taking notes very fast, "may I ask on what grounds you have a conscientious objection to obeying my order?"

The quartermaster edged the wheel truculently a little more to port; he stared fixedly at the lights, and said, "Sir, I have a conscientious objection to playin' the goat! likewise to gettin' run down—so now you can make a lighthouse of me¹ an' be hung to it."

Miss Roberts crossed to the binnacle, made an entry, and returned. "Make a lighthouse of you; what do you mean?"

The quartermaster stared. "If you don't know, I'm

¹ Enter him in the official log, *i.e.*, disgrace him.

suttin'ly sure I don't, missy. Look at it square," he urged ; " why, it's murder—it's——"

The fourth officer closed her book. "The man is demented," she observed. "I can do nothing with him. It is most unsafe."

CHAPTER VI

3 A.M.

MISS ROBERTS crossed to her friend who stood on the wing platform, and at once began to speak. It seemed, she said, on the face of it, that the position was sufficiently serious to warrant an appeal to powers higher than theirs, and quoted a legal authority to the effect that in all questions of documentary evidence it was necessary to take counsel's opinion, and gave it as hers, that so grave a dereliction from duty as that which had come before them necessitated at least a court-martial. "In any case," she concluded, closing her book of notes, "I think we should act on standing order No. 5, and call the commander."

Sadie Cole was reluctant to do this. She remarked that the others had conducted their watches without having had recourse to the commander, and she didn't quite see why they couldn't. She argued that she was strong enough to compel obedience; that she would like to see the man, or men, who would dare to disobey her if she took them in hand—and as for consulting counsel, she believed in force, latent, moral, and dynamic—especially the latter. "Force," she asserted, "will compel obedience even from a human document, if it is backed with the irons."

But Lilian Roberts had a dread of force. As a side issue, too, she was fond of argument. Besides, she had already had the benefit of some hours' study of the human document (nautical), and remembering the power of men if it came to a test of strength, persisted in her opposition. She quoted finally the dictum of their distant instructor, giving the vernacular with facile mimicry: "In all ques-

tions, ladies, av the maintenance of bridge discipline, remember ye mustn't act on your own responsibility. If it's a ship in soight—call the commander ; if it's a man overboard—call the commander ; if it's the crew, or the coffee, or the devil—call the commander. That's whhat he's there for. That's whhat he gets his extra pay for ; that's whhat he has all noight in for—to sthand by for a call.

"Moind, ladies, the captain is judge, Lord High Chancellor, an' House av Curls all rolled in wan. There's no appeal beyand—then roust him out ; he expects it."

Sadie Cole looked up with laughter in her eyes. Miss Roberts's pince-nez had fallen with a click to her waist-belt. She seemed prepared in her serious manner with further reminiscences—and, meanwhile, this troublesome steamer, whose bow they were unable to cross, slid along beside them, driving them towards Southampton. She stamped on the grating.

"Oh, bother !" she said. "Very well—call Violet."

Miss Roberts departed on her errand with a careful salute, and at the foot of the ladder perceived Carragh watching the steamer. He looked up at the sound, and seeing that she appeared worried, approached and said, "Can I be of any assistance ?"

Miss Roberts paused. "I think," she said, "I had better carry out my instructions. I was going to call my commander."

She seemed so grave, so dignified, and full of importance that Carragh felt inclined to smile ; but he hastened to reassure her. "She will be here in a moment. I sent the quartermaster."

"You ? Oh, it's awfully good of you—but——"

"Is it that steamer ?" Carragh questioned to divert her.

"Yes ; and the men have developed a conscientious objection to obeying our orders—it—it is very annoying."

Carragh looked grave now. Miss Roberts considered the expression suited him, and almost wished he would remain grave always. It gave him, she said, an air of sadness—so remote, so thoughtful—like that on the face of a man who had been refused but was unable to forget—for Miss Roberts, when one could get behind the veil, was as romantic a little woman as ever stood on deck at midnight and stared at the stars for sympathy. She

sighed ; but Carragh's reply had brought her back to the worries of command. He said—

"I am sorry to hear you say that. Still, I think you must admit there were extenuating circumstances."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you know, she was horribly close. You should not have tried to cross her bows."

"But she is the give-way ship."

"You are the overtaking ship, Miss Roberts."

"Yes ; but we are 'on her starboard side,' so *she* must give way."

"Pardon. You overhauled her, and should have gone under her stern. Instead of that you altered the course to the northward. Since then our friend has fired up. He intends to race us to Southampton——"

"But—but," Miss Roberts interrupted, "indeed we did not alter the course. That was the quartermaster's doing."

Carragh whistled, but quickly checked himself. "I beg your pardon," he said. "That is worse than before. Well, you must not alter it back, or we shall have a collision—ah ! here come Miss Ramsden and Lady Barraclough. I will be off." He raised his cap, and returned to his chair, while Miss Roberts, visibly puzzled, hastened to meet her friends.

The dawn was slowly lifting, and, had it been clear, the steamer foaming along beside them would have been distinctly seen ; but in that dim light, and half shrouded by the haze, she appeared like a wraith, intangible, distant and visionary as that enchanting myth the Flying Dutchman.

Spars and rigging were there, but they were indicated by a delicate tracery that blended with and melted into the greyness ; twin funnels and smoke were there, but they dissolved in the mist like steam upon a fog ; men were there anxiously watching the manœuvres of this stranger, also in grey, who refused to obey the rule of the road ; but they moved about on the bridge and decks like phantoms, speechless, silent. The only note that crossed the narrow stretch of grey-green sea shimmering between them was the hiss and rush of the bow wave, and the drone of roaring fires driving the machinery.

Carragh turned in his chair and lay back to watch. He recognised that the navigators were face to face with

difficulty ; they were, as a sailor would say, jammed, and he desired to see how they would extricate themselves. He had spent the night in a species of doze ; every event, every order had passed before him, and perhaps a dozen times he had been on the point of going to the bridge to offer advice, or to assume control ; but he had sat tight, hoping that by some natural turn of events the tangle might be cleared without special intervention from him. Now that turn had arrived. They were racing through a greasy dawn beside a steamer of equal speed, and were bound Southampton-ward instead of down Channel ; and the men " had developed a conscientious objection to obeying orders ! " In other circumstances Carragh could have shouted with laughter ; the predicament was so human, so quixotic. He thought of Harrison, wondered what he would say, and remembered that the situation was apoplectic for a man of Harrison's corpulence—besides which there were other considerations that effectually silenced him. Violet Ramsden was captain. Violet Ramsden would have to control these straying tendencies. He wondered how she would act, and glanced along the deck to find her.

She was on the bridge. He discovered her face above the screen—white, piquant, beautiful. It reminded him of the *Rajah*—of the days when, as " Paddy," he taught a sweet girl-friend the use of the sextant. Now he was responsible for her safety, for the safety of all those others ; but she commanded, he was an automaton struggling to obey—it was unthinkable.

He inquired what she would do, and leaned back puzzled. It was an *impasse* ; it was a situation that required grip, *nous* ; that required, if she would avoid advertisement of her officers' incapacity, delicate handling. There were two ways of arriving at a solution : the point was—which would Violet Ramsden choose ? would she choose either ?

In his eagerness to see, he rose and leaned over the rail. Lady Barraclough recognised the movement and drew near.

" You are up early, captain," she remarked, halting beside him.

He replied coldly that Lady Barraclough was also an early riser.

"I was called," she announced ; "but you——"

"Can scarcely say I have been asleep," he concluded, seeing she paused.

Lady Barraclough smiled. "I fear that we are responsible for your wakefulness. It is a consequence one had overlooked, or at all events had not recognised."

The voice was less harsh, the smile not unkind. Carragh could only equivocate. "I have no desire for sleep," he said ; "one leaves rest ashore on sailing day. It isn't a new experience."

"Why fence, Captain Carragh ? You look weary ; go down to your bed."

"How can I ?" he questioned.

"Can't you trust us ?"

"Some—perhaps ; others . . . well, look at this." He pointed to the steamer wallowing mistily close at hand. "Was ever such a position known ? In a very little while all hands will be up staring at it—quizzing, asking what you will do ; how you will get back to your course ; what Miss Ramsden will suggest now that she has been called. Sailors are keen critics—the position is impossible."

"I understand," said Lady Barraclough, "from what Miss Roberts tells me, that it is even worse. Please explain."

"As far as that goes," Carragh rejoined, "it is a technical blunder ; one that might happen to any one. When we first sighted him we were the faster ship, and as we were overhauling him we should have got out of the way ; instead of that we altered our course parallel to his. He thought we meant to cross his bows, and fired up to prevent it ; now our speed is equal—but as he has us 'on his own starboard side,' by the rule of the road we must stand on and he must give way. But, again, he imagines we are bound to Southampton, and won't do so. He will race us for all he is worth, and we must get out of the way in order that we may resume our course. You see, the question has become involved by keeping."

"Well—but can't you speak to him and tell him what has happened ?"

"Not till daylight. It is too dark to read the flags yet."

"But surely you have some method by which you can make yourself understood at night ?"

"In the Navy there are flashlights for such work, and heliographs, semaphores, and flags for daytime—but these things are not for us."

"Why?"

Carragh looked up with a gesture of annoyance. "Well," he said, "you see we are the Mercantile Marine."

Lady Barraclough lashed out momentarily. "I fail to see the reason of your sneer, sir. If it is necessary for His Majesty's ships to be able to communicate at night, it is necessary for the Merchant Service. Why don't you ventilate the matter? Why don't you compel your Company to give you the appliances?—Can't? forsooth! I am astonished."

"Compel? My dear lady, we are forgetting that my Company could not act alone; that the thing is an international question; and aren't we forgetting my position, also the *tertium quid* of whom I spoke before?"

"Go on," said Lady Barraclough; "this *tertium quid* of yours appears to be everywhere. I am interested."

Carragh laughed. "You are anxious to see beneath the surface already; once I was the same—now I am a commander and must hold my peace—why? Ask yourself, Lady Barraclough, how long I should hold my command if I 'suggested' too many difficulties. Besides, If you think of it, when the Lords that be have no time to attend to paltry details of shipping, what could I do? They have statistics of the accidents at sea; of the loss of life—but they do nothing; one is driven to the conclusion that it is immaterial. The appliances with which men in the Merchant Service work; the fog-signals; the speaking methods; the lighting methods, are no better than they were when steam first came into fashion—worse, ships are manned now by machines—it is law; what can we do? Blunder on; wait; grow old and humped with watching, then knuckle down, say our prayers, and go to sleep."

Lady Barraclough came near and touched his arm. "Captain Carragh," she said very quietly, "I am glad you did not resign. To be candid, I rather hoped you would. I was annoyed. A suggestion . . . no matter. You are teaching me."

He looked up with a flash of astonishment. "Thank you," he said: "but I fear I have been indiscreet."

"How?"

"As you reminded me before—there are some things it is not wise to put into speech; facts that are part and parcel of our lives, of our existence in the station we have attained only after long and hazardous work."

The distant note of a gong fell on his ears and he turned to read the telegraph. "Hah!" he cried. "Miss Ramsden has learnt her lesson well. Yes—I, too, am glad I did not resign—now. Listen! does that stillness convey any meaning to you?"

"Stillness? . . . Oh, I see—yes, the vibration appears to be less noticeable. Is that it?"

"Precisely. I can trust your commander, Lady Barraclough. She has done the only thing a navigator could do—sensibly. But it has cost her something; for, by slowing, the other vessel will appear to beat us, and that, you may guess, is not a palatable condition for a ship-master."

Again Lady Barraclough glanced at her companion. The colour had mounted to his bronzed face, his eyes sparkled—it was easy to read him. A smile, grim and very inscrutable, passed her features as she said, "You appear much interested in Miss Ramsden's evolution, Captain Carragh."

Carragh immediately brought himself to look at the steamer. "Evolutions," he replied with a differentiating inflection, "are always interesting to a sailor. Besides, when you think of it, I was the first to initiate her in the mysteries of navigation."

"On the *Rajah*, I suppose?"

"Yes. General Ramsden was coming home 'to do some cruising,' as he said, 'before he died,' and he wished Miss Ramsden to help him."

"You didn't call her Miss Ramsden in those days?" said Lady Barraclough.

"Why should I?" he questioned.

"If she called you Paddy, for instance," she remarked, "I see no reason why you should not."

"Not?" he glanced up, caught her eyes, and turned to stare seaward. "She looks beautiful in the half-light," he continued, "and how suggestive."

"Beautiful—suggestive—who? How?"

"The steamer," said Carragh. "Beautiful in her strength; suggestive of her power to crush the life out of vessels smaller than herself; suggestive of the blind obedience with which she obeys the force that controls her; suggestive, too, of her monstrous brutality, her inability to do anything, wonder anything—only to obey."

"Dear me!" Lady Barraclough sneered "I thought you were speaking of a woman." She turned away. The subtle sea influence was upon her, causing her to speak with this man as though his sex were hers. She awoke with a start and moved down the deck. Carragh remained leaning over the rail, watching.

The vessel drew up in the still, white dawn; pulsing smoky breath that blotted the remoter seascape. She passed onward, athrob with the touch of her powerful engines, she cleft the water, and it leaped about her in sparkling globes of foam. A wave turned over broad on either bow, gambolling, hissing, hinting at unknown greens and translucent blues; a splutter of froth and seething eddies met it, carried it on, stretched out like an unending V, far into that misty and vast horizon where the sun-god was busy with his brushes colouring the dawn.

Calm, silent, impassive, she dashed forward—a wraith come to life; a Flying Dutchman no baffling winds could hinder; a monster picked out in black and white; straight, angular, rigid; with a stem like a knife and a stern like a pillow—one of England's competitors, a *Messageries Maritimes* of France.

The bridge watched her; the men congregated in groups on the lower deck watched her also; they criticised her lack of sheer, her black solidity, and compared her, as sailors will, with the more graceful liners of the Clyde. Then some one discovered an ensign fluttering mistily at the peak hallyards, and there was a quick rush to acknowledge the courtesy.

The Frenchman hoisted, England hoisted; the Frenchman dipped, England dipped—it was, as one might say, "good morning—*au revoir*." And the pink dawn looked down to smile on the picture.

Violet Ramsden glanced over the bridge screen; she

beckoned with her hand, and her voice fell on the ears of the two standing near the rail—

“Honor! ” she cried. “I want you, dear. . . . You too, please, Captain Carragh.”

Commonplace—supremely commonplace—but it was Violet Ramsden who called, and her hand was as white as steam.

CHAPTER VII

4 TO 5 A.M.

THEY stood on the bridge in a group debating the position, with Carragh as advisor, Violet Ramsden indignant, Sadie Cole and Lilian Roberts a trifle non-plussed, Lady Barraclough with a new *motif*, unexpressed, but noticeable in her quieter manner.

"We cannot allow the matter to drop," said Miss Ramsden with emphasis. "If we do the men will have the whip-hand, and we know what that means!"

"It was the thing that bred the Indian Mutiny, if my reading is correct," said Sadie Cole; "this also was mutiny—distinct, unpardonable. I should put them under arrest, look in at Plymouth, and let the law do the rest."

"And create a scandal at the very outset," Lady Barraclough objected. "My dear, is it wise?"

Miss Roberts adjusted her pince-nez and quoted from her notes: "The quartermaster, who first spoke, said definitely that 'he had a conscientious objection to calling Violet Ramsden.' He did not say why, and I had no opportunity to ask him. The quartermaster who steered said he had 'a conscientious objection to starboardin' his hellum,' and when I asked him why, he replied, 'Moses! see that steamer, missy?' That answer cannot be considered definite or logical; in point of fact, it seemed to me to evade the point."

"Not a doubt about that," said Lady Barraclough. "But it would be interesting to hear why number one objected. What do you think—shall we call him?"

"If I may offer a suggestion," Carragh put it, "I should say, 'Let sleeping dogs lie.'"

"And allow them to gain strength to grip you," said

Sadie Cole. "That's not how we do things in the States."

"Nor is it my notion," said Miss Ramsden.

"You are in a minority already, captain," said Miss Roberts. "I am sorry to vote against you."

"Call him," Lady Barraclough snapped.

The man appeared after some minutes' interval and saluted. He looked preternaturally obtuse. Miss Ramsden at once addressed him.

"I understand," she remarked, "that you refused to obey orders just now, and I am interested to know on what grounds?"

The man glanced up. He noted the fact that, although Carragh was present, he took no part in the questioning, and from that argued shrewdly that his commander would not judge him. He replied at once by evading the point.

"Grounds?" he remarked; "beg pardon, sir—no, it was the wheelhouse."

"You understand us perfectly," cried Miss Ramsden. "Say at once, why did you refuse to call me?"

"Sir," said the man, quickly shifting his position, "I didn't like the look of things. I didn't know where to find you, an' didn't care about bein' too far away when there's a collision in the wind."

"Nonsense! You knew perfectly well that I was lying down on my sofa; you had instructions, in common with the others, where to find me—why did you choose to disobey?"

"I didn't choose," said the quartermaster enigmatically.

"You are begging the question," cried Miss Ramsden.

The quartermaster rolled an eye towards Lady Barraclough and became explanatory. "To put it plain," he said, "I have a conscientious subjection to sayin' w'y I didn't choose."

"Answer me," cried Miss Ramsden, distinctly angry at the man's manner.

"No more nonsense, quartermaster," said Carragh sternly. "Speak up."

The man threw a pleading look at his commander, but Carragh refused to see it, and he complied. "Well, sir," he said, "if you will have it—I'm a married man, sir, an' I subject conscientiously against havin' to call females—leastways, ladies. One's enough for me."

"Oh!" said Miss Ramsden, and subsided.

Sadie Cole and Lilian Roberts echoed the remark.

They stood in a group staring at this man, who had acquired a conscience he could use, uncertain whether to believe him or to disbelieve him—whether to laugh or cry. There was a moment of silence. Lady Barraclough coughed and raised her starers. She examined him as though he were some new specimen in the way of bonnets, until Carragh interpreted the general desire. "Get out of it!" he ordered. "Go to your room and await instructions."

The quartermaster saluted, turned on his heel, and went down the ladder. Lady Barraclough immediately addressed her companions: "If it were not that I believe sailors are unsophisticated and generous," she remarked, "I should be inclined to think he is making use of my speech on the enlightenment of the human race. Dear me—how very puzzling!"

"Sailors are precisely what you make them," said Carragh with a shrug.

"But what are we to do now?" Miss Ramsden questioned.

"It will be the talk of the ship!" Miss Roberts asserted. "I *wish* I had voted with the captain."

"It's sheer ridicule!" Sadie Cole cried out; "I vote we carry out my motion and clap him in irons."

"Can't you lock him up somewhere, Captain Carragh?" Lilian Roberts put in.

"What for?"

"Insolence."

"Pardon—you can't lock up a man for mere insolence in the Merchant Service. His game is to egg you on, to make you assault him; then he will sue you for damages."

"Captain Carragh!"

"I am not exaggerating. This man is what is known as a sea-lawyer—it is easier to deal with the sea-serpent. He is under the control of the agitator and, as I said before, if you put a man in irons in these days, there are questions asked in the House to-morrow, and you run the risk of a strike among all hands. Besides, when you think of it, he only obeyed orders."

"But he refused at first."

"He can be punished for that—still, I doubt the wisdom of such a course."

"Then what can we do?"

"Two things," Carragh replied: "either adopt Mrs. Cole's suggestion, put into Plymouth and pay him off, or grin and bear it."

"On the whole," said Miss Ramsden, "I think we should put into Plymouth."

"I can't agree to that," Lady Barraclough interrupted; "I prefer to adopt Captain Carragh's more breezy suggestion."

"Oh, but surely——" Miss Ramsden began.

"My dear, the man's motive seems to me quite plain and orthodox. He has a conscientious objection. We need not inquire too closely into the ethics of the case; it is an argument of considerable weight, and at present I am not prepared to condemn him off-hand."

There was silence after this for some minutes. Miss Ramsden plainly did not agree; she looked at Carragh. Mrs. Cole did not agree; she bit her lips. Miss Roberts, however, was for temporising; she glanced up with her winning smile and said, "Then there is the other man—the one who refused to starboard when ordered—that, surely, is an indictable offence?"

"The less we say about that," Carragh rejoined, "the better for every one."

"But he refused," said Sadie Cole dogmatically.

"He will reply—to prevent a collision."

"If only one could get a cup of tea," sighed Miss Roberts in despair.

"Oh, but that is nonsense," said Mrs. Cole; but she addressed Carragh and did not consider the tea.

"I am afraid I couldn't condemn him, Mrs. Cole."

"We don't ask you to condemn him, sir," Lady Barraclough lashed out.

"If it came to a question of evidence," Carragh retorted slowly, "I regret to say I should be compelled to coincide with such a view."

"This is monstrous!" Lady Barraclough exclaimed in her most dictatorial manner. "I consider your conduct most inexplicable; apparently you are in league with the men and desire to affront us—to——"

"Lady Barraclough," Carragh interrupted sternly, "apparently you forget your position and mine. I decline to bandy words."

He lifted his cap and left the bridge before either could reply, and at once Miss Roberts turned on the autocrat. "I don't think that was kind," she said.

"I don't think it was just," said Miss Ramsden.

"I don't think," Sadie resumed with just that small tinge of accent that advertised her nationality, "that it will hurt him. Your men seem to want a little plucking up by the roots; they are what Americans call 'too all-fired sensitive.'"

Lady Barraclough looked around at her young friends. "Already?" she questioned bitterly; then in more persuasive accents but in sentences that stung, "I thought we were agreed. I thought we had decided that women were the equals of men; that we could meet them and oust them from their monopoly of power—yet at the first breath a man divides us. How consistent we are—how constant!"

Miss Ramsden took up the cudgels very quietly. "It is not fair to make aspersions on people one knows; nor is it fair to twit us in the way you do. As far as I understand the position, you asked Captain Carragh's advice, and then snubbed him for giving it; yet in the very same breath you are upholding a man whom I consider a sneak, because he cants about conscientious objections. Don't you think Captain Carragh spoke conscientiously? or is it only when a subordinate has learned to snivel correctly that you listen to him?"

Lady Barraclough looked up with a smile of indifference. "You defend your friend well, Violet; I congratulate you. Yes, it is almost a pity I persuaded you to give up the law—you would have made such an excellent advocate."

"I object to your tone, Honoria," said Miss Ramsden very coolly.

"I flattered myself I was rather complimentary, dear," Lady Barraclough returned.

"I believe," said Miss Roberts, "that we had better send for a cup of tea—we are all tired and annoyed and dis——"

"Say," cried Mrs. Cole, "if you go on like that, I shall upset the whole show. Now suppose——"

"Beg pardon, miss," said a voice from the wheelhouse, "but one of the 'ands pawsed this up to me to give to

you." He added, after a moment's indecision, "They're waitin' for an answer."

"They," said Sadie Cole. "Very good. Attend to your steering."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the man and retired.

This was a note screwed up in a piece of brown paper and addressed to "the Lady Commander," Miss Ramsden took it and proceeded to open gingerly.

"'Madam,'" she read; "me and my mates desire the privilege of a word on urgent business. Will you be so kind as to cast your eye on the starboard after-deck where the deputation awaits?"

"TOMAS JONSON."

"A deputation!" Miss Ramsden laughed. "Cast my eye on the starboard after-deck—bless the men, of course I will." She crossed over at once and returned to her friends to say, "I will see what they want."

"Do you think it wise?" Lady Barraclough hazarded.

"Why not?"

"My dear, you are young and pretty—too pretty by half; there, that makes amends, doesn't it? Let me interview them."

Violet Ramsden waved her hand. "Nonsense," she cried; "I am the lady commander."

It was now fully day, and the sun threw long spears of light obliquely across the clouds; the mist still held in patches, uncertain whether it was beaten or triumphant. Little stretches of horizon, broken up and indefinite, appeared at intervals. The Channel was peopled with ships—ships under steam moving like dim beetles on their backs; ships under sail, each with a vast spread of canvas hanging like shutters on a barn; coasters, barges, fishermen, all lying quiescent waiting the breath of the gale which was to disperse them.

The *Southern Cross* alone seemed full of life. She hissed through the oily swell with scarcely a perceptible quiver; and on the starboard after-promenade were the men awaiting the advent of the lord who ordered their lives.

Miss Ramsden passed along the deck with a quick step; a trifle curious; a trifle flushed from the knottiness of the problems she had already faced; a trifle anxious

to know what lay before her, and paused beside a lifeboat, saying—

"Yes—what is it?"

A tall man with a nubbly brow and powerful frame pulled off his cap and held it crunched in one hand. Miss Ramsden noticed that he was very stout, that the guernsey part of his anatomy looked like a pudding; and glancing at his companions, saw that they too were similarly swollen. It struck her as odd—but her attention was taken by the leader, who advanced a step and said—

"Beg pardon, miss—leastways, as I understand it's to be sir—sir. Anyways, beg pardon——"

"Don't mention it," said Miss Ramsden, fluttered into conventionality by the man's visible efforts at self-command. "Well, what can I do for you?"

"Me an' my mates," said the man, "want a word of explanation, an', says I, if you want anythin', go an' see the old man—leastways, meanin' you, miss, w'ich is sir, an' as it's no use astin' a bo'sun—we come."

"Yes," said Miss Ramsden.

"It's that speech o' yours, miss, w'ich is sir, that's tied us all hup in knots. We dunno w'ere we are, in a manner of speakin', an' we'd like to know—bein' sailors, an' men, an' not 'eathens or naked sevidges—w'y we're took in charge body 'n' soul to have an' to 'old fer the space of six months certain, with wotsoevers an' w'ensoevers 'n' such-like, w'en we're signed on 'n' know all about it same as always."

The man spoke at a rapid gallop, then paused for breath, and Miss Ramsden managed to gasp, "Oh, that—that was a figure of speech, nothing more."

"Figer o' speech?" said the man nodding at his companions, then staring at Miss Ramsden. "Nothin' behind it . . . no kicks at the union, nothin' as we might call dentrimental to our p'sition as sailors an' unionists?" The man concluded with a gasp as before, and his nubbly brow visibly sweated.

"Nothing in the world. I simply wished to let you know that I am master, and that you would have to obey orders."

"Legitimate orders, hof course," said a voice from out of a frame of lank hair on the extreme left.

Miss Ramsden desired to laugh, but she replied, "Certainly."

"Hold your wind!" said the man with the nubbly brow. "Ain't I carryin' out your wishes?"

"Yes—go on."

"Then 'old your gas!" He referred obliquely to a paper he held, and resumed at a rush, "Oh, an' about our skipper, Cap'n Carragh, 'n' his oficers—where do they come in, an' are we to obey them, or are we to hobey you?"

Miss Ramsden felt more inclined than ever, watching that perspiring brow and swollen guernsey, to laugh and tell them to do as they liked—as they wished; only to let her laugh or sleep or cry, as she desired; but she held herself rigidly in hand, and said—

"When we are on the bridge, obey us; when Captain Carragh or his officers are on the bridge, obey them. They are your real officers; but we are your owners, temporarily; and although you are signed on to act under them, you must also act under us. Is that clear?"

"Clear as mud, sir, an' thankee," said the man; but he had no intention of being funny, he was very serious, and again referred to his notes. "Oh," he said, "'n' about leaves 'n' junketin's—an' the King's grant—wot's behind it all? We ast," he read out, "because we want to know w'ere we stand; 'n' not out of hany wish to annoy you or put on you, or do anythin' as sailor-men shouldn't do on the 'igh seas, an' 'specially with a captain as is a lady 'n' not a gentleman. That's our meanin', miss—leastways, sir—an' wot can I tell my mates?"

He concluded again abruptly, and stuffing the paper into his pocket, stood with both hands before him in that attitude known as standing at ease, when undertaken by a man not drilled in the Merchant Service.

"You may tell your mates," said Miss Ramsden, with a smile that set the dimples dancing and the men staring, "you can tell them that I spoke out of simple friendship and out of a desire to promote harmony. Also that you are asked to do nothing that is not in the articles which you have signed."

"An' that speech of this 'ere Lady Barracouta, miss——"

"Barracough."

"Same thing, miss—leastways, so I've 'eard—that speech as she made us at the shippin' office stan's good?"

"It does."

"Then it's a kenundrum," said the man with the nubbly brow, and saluted, adding as an afterthought, "Thankee, miss—we're much obliged."

The others spoke to the same sentiment, then all shuffled away to their quarters, and Violet Ramsden faced the calm, still morning with eyes that danced.

She looked out upon the thirsty sun swimming in a bath of mist; said, softly, "Children," and longed to laugh; but the stillness, the silence restrained her. She noted the little ships standing with their hands folded and gazing wistfully at the hurrying liners, and desired to cry; but the silence appalled her. She dared not cry. She saw their picturesque attitudes, the waiting droop of their sails, the black and odorous breath of the funnels, and told herself they were children and men; babies in frocks and curls; men in bowlers and smoking cigars; the imperious great and the infinitely small; the imperious small and the infinitely great—perhaps fifty pictures, all asking the question of the man with the nubbly brow—"Wot's the meanin' of it all?" "W'ere do we come in?"

Other questions flashed into being as she resigned herself to the influence of the wide sweeping distances. Why were they there, usurping the place of men, putting themselves in invidious positions, making a laughing-stock of their sex and wasting their lives. Would her father have permitted it, had he lived? She stared at the leaping bow wave, trying to smile. Then there was Carragh, Paddy, she still called him in her sleeve, who had been insulted. She said it distinctly, as she watched the scintillating fires—insulted by her friend. What would he do? What would Honoria do?—what could she do? It was paltry, too paltry for words. She looked into the mistiness. It was very misty. It was blurred. Rain fell—nonsense, it was not rain.

In the face of that dreamy sunrise; in the face of those nebulous shapes and the vast, unending seascape; in the face of all those quivering doubts, fears, questions, there was no answer ready but the one she had given. Besides, when you think of it, the girl had been abruptly called from that species of sleep men term a doze, and, as Miss Roberts asserted, stood visibly in want of tea.

There was tea on the bridge when at length she

returned ; tea in thick cups, standing in a lagoon of saucer-tea. Milk and sugar had been lavishly added, and an extra lump dissolved in each lagoon, as though the pantry considered its knowledge of taste a thing not quite definite, and was prepared to concede a point without argument.

Sadie Cole tasted it and said—"Slops !"

Miss Ramsden tasted it, and said—"Clear as mud," but she was thinking of the man with the nubbly brow.

Miss Roberts tasted it and said—"And I did so long for a cup of tea."

Lady Barraclough put her cup back tenderly in its own little lagoon, and said, decisively and finally—"Onions !—call the chief steward."

But she referred to the tea.

CHAPTER VIII

BEEES THAT HUM ; WASPS THAT STING

CAPTAIN CARRAGH leaned against the forward end of the saloon skylight sipping his tea. Beside him, balancing a small tray thoughtfully on the palm of his left hand, stood Wo-sun, his Chinese boy, enjoying that freedom of speech an Englishman invariably permits to a native servant and withholds from his own.

The captain's tea was served from a delicate china pot in a cosmopolitan fashion entirely self-invented ; that is to say, it was prepared on the Chinese plan, through an infusor ; was flavoured *a la Russe* with a thin slice of lemon ; and, as a concession in favour of British institutions, was taken sweetened from a cup instead of a glass.

Wo-sun made it, brought it, handed it ; and it is safe to say that had Lady Barraclough or either of her "officers" known of Sammy's powers as a tea-maker, they would have been prepared to subsidise him liberally. But they did not know, and Carragh was not in the mood to inform them. Yet he chatted with the boy in his usual offhand fashion.

The tea was hot, it was good, it stood in a cup like a wafer, and its colour was that of pale sherry—still Carragh growled—

"Not number one tea this morning, Sammy," he said ; "how's that, eh ?"

Sammy gulped and blinked his eyes, for he knew his master. "I go makee other cup, seh . . . tink p'laps cook changee my tea for ship tea while I go way minute."

"What you do that for ?" Carragh questioned.

"Lä-y Ballaclup call me. Say, 'Who you belong, boy ?' I say I belong you. She say, 'Dea me,' an' lookkee thloo

specacles on endee long pole. Tink me monkey, seh . . . long time she look. Make-um liggie," Sammy concluded.

"Hah! and what did you say?"

"I say nottin', seh. . . . I 'flaid. . . . Lă-y Ballaclup plenty big . . . me no big. No can do. I ketchee Capin other cup-a tea?"

"No—all right, Sammy. It's better now. On the whole, I don't think the cook effected the change you suggest—I rather fancy it's a touch of . . . eh? never mind, call it the personal equation."

"What that?" said Sammy, with eyes screwed small with pleasure.

"A thing bred in countries where unpronounceable women play ducks and drakes with other people's affairs, and persuade girls that the only business in life is the acquisition of positions they are unable to fill."

Sammy twinkled from head to foot; he understood nothing entirely; but a glimmer was there, and he nodded profusely. "That bad," he said; "bad."

"It is," Carragh admitted. "What would you do with them in Shanghai—eh, Sammy?"

"Shanghai no plopper China-town . . . p'laps no do notting; but up liver, long-a way up, by Tien-sit-foo, tie-um up all-ee same as ole bundle, no can move one time. Then bling sold'ers—makee plenty holes in bundle . . . flow knives . . . cut lillee bits off . . . arm, leg, nose, tongue——"

"Hold on, you little heathen. These are women, Sammy—women."

Sammy shook his head. "All light," he said, "no makee diffience."

"Do you know," Carragh remarked, sipping his tea, "that I believe you would enjoy such a business; you whom I have taught, and civilised, and pampered."

"Pampered?" said Sammy, "what that?"

"Kicked—you little devil—savvy?"

Sammy grinned, but he said nothing. He had acquired that knowledge an English servant rarely attains, he knew precisely how far he might advance, and never overtoed the mark.

Carragh finished his tea. He watched the horizon, the clouds, the sullen and heaving sea, and said, "It's going to blow, Sammy."

Sammy reached for the cup. "All light, seh," he replied ; "can do."

The bridge might have been a thousand miles astern ; so also might Lady Barraclough, or the boy, still standing like a sentry holding the delicate china teapot on its tray, and it was, until the deck addressed its powers to convey a message to Carragh's ears. A not heavy footfall ; an indescribable rustle ; the flutter of garments that tend to hamper the advance of women, and for which men and prudes alike are thankful.

Carragh concentrated his gaze on the horizon ; there was no occasion to look up, nor was there any occasion for the rather stern note that tinged his next remark. "Yes," he said, "the first impression was correct. The tea leaves a flavour. Sammy, get my bath ready."

The boy turned about. His face suggested anxiety, sorrow, despair ; yet he said when he was out of hearing, "*Tu-ne-a-ma*," with the peculiar inflection of a Chinaman who means it, and added as he approached the saloon entrance, "Capin no likee Lā-y Ballaclup. That bad . . . damn bad."

Lady Barraclough came along the promenade and halted beside the rail near Carragh. She stood regarding the vanishing Chinaman through her starers. They dropped with a click at her side as he disappeared, and Carragh looked up to find himself the object of her scrutiny.

He would have moved, but to do so would look like running away ; besides, when he considered the matter, it seemed probable that Lady Barraclough desired to . . . suppose you call it, tone down her latest indiscretion ? He decided to remain, to allow her to eat humble pie in the most difficult fashion—unassisted ; and was recalled to the fact of her indifference by her voice saying—

"Why are you not in the Navy, Captain Carragh ?"

The question was so unexpected, so inexplicable, so at variance with his conceived notion of her thought, that he could only blurt out. "Because I am a fool."

"Precisely," said Lady Barraclough ; "but that, after all, is an opinion you might leave me to gather from your friends, and no answer to my question."

Carragh looked up more amused than annoyed. "Perhaps," he remarked, "I should have said, because I am in the Merchant Service."

"That would be equivalent to admitting that the Merchant Service formed your manner, Captain Carragh."

"I might retort that Lady Barraclough evidently finds the atmosphere infectious," he said with some show of heat.

"But you won't," said Lady Barraclough ; "at least, I don't fancy you will, because that would be rude."

He stammered an apology. "I beg your pardon . . . and yet . . . after all."

"I drove you to it?" she smiled. "Nay, you are wrong ; you misread a friendly suggestion. I simply wished to point out that your manner is not quite one's conception of the Merchant Service manner—judging, as one does, by the specimens one meets—Harrison, for instance, or Crang."

"My manner is my own, Lady Barraclough, and whether it is induced by an acquaintance with the Merchant Service and the men you mention, or by some other cause, is all one."

"You are testy," said Lady Barraclough ; "you have a bitter tongue."

Carragh felt that he might, in justice, retort that he knew some one else who had that gift pretty evenly mixed with butter ; but he contented himself with the simple excuse, "I have been up all night."

"So too have I," said Lady Barraclough ; "yet you would hardly venture to say it has made me testy."

"On the contrary," Carragh returned with a bow, "most interesting ;" but his face suggested boredom.

"That is a phrase," said Lady Barraclough, "which requires accentuation with the eyes. It is indiscreet to use it otherwise. Nay, don't prevaricate ; or, if you like it better, apologise. I am an old woman, old enough to be your mother. I might, for aught you know, have dandled you in my lap—yet you choose to consider yourself affronted by my plain speech."

"I don't think it was a fair speech," Carragh replied ; but his mind was occupied with the notion she had thrown out ; he refused to consider it possible that so strange and masculine a figure could dandle, at any stage, a child in its arms. The serious face belied it as much, perhaps more,

than did the outlandish mushroom hat perched rakishly on her head at an angle women would certainly call vulgar. He could find nothing extenuating, either, in the speech. It rankled, and he waited for her to modify or withdraw it. But Lady Barraclough's next remark showed him conclusively that she had no intention of doing so—she reverted to her first question—

"If you will not tell me why you are not in the Navy, perhaps you will enlighten me as to how the late Attorney General appreciates his son's dignity?"

Carragh looked his astonishment, and something more, but he replied lightly, "Faith, I don't believe he thinks of it."

"Are you sure that is true?"

"Lady Barraclough," he said with a slight emphasis, "I know nothing about it. I never go home."

"Why not?"

Carragh glanced about the decks, looked seaward; examined the budding storm-signals—but nothing seemed sufficiently urgent to warrant an evasion. Wo-sun was there with a bath towel over his arm; still, Carragh refused to see him and faced his companion. She watched him, and probably read him to the full, for his rejoinder produced no effect on the grave, stern countenance.

"As far as I can remember," he said, "I have answered several questions; some that I would willingly have kept unanswered. You must not, therefore, accuse me of rudeness if I say that I cannot pursue this subject farther. A man's relations with his father are personal and confidential matters that can have no interest, or should have no interest, for any one else. I hope," he added somewhat awkwardly, "that I have put it without offence."

"Entirely—indeed, for a man brought up in the Merchant Service, very creditably."

"Why are you so bitter about the Merchant Service?" Carragh exclaimed, stung beyond endurance at the other's manner.

"Pardon, I take my cue from you. If I remember rightly, you said, in answer to my question about your methods of signalling, 'You see we are the Mercantile Marine.'"

"You are kind to remind me," Carragh replied with a sarcastic inflection.

"Justice," said Lady Barraclough, as she turned away, "is seldom found at the door of kindness."

Carragh went to take his bath. He felt, as did Harrison, that nature required refreshing.

CHAPTER IX

CONCERNING THE TULIPS

A GAIN a red sun looked out from the edge of the world, and saw the yacht steaming straight for that bank of luminous cloud lying hard-edged and frowning upon the western horizon. Again it glanced about the decks, throwing shadows, lighting up the forms of those pushful navigators who desired to perfect themselves in an art belonging essentially to mankind. Again it saw Carragh reclining in the long deck chair he had occupied all night, noted the petulance with which he rid himself of his nest of rugs, stretched and accepted tea at the hand of the Chinese boy; and now, at nine o'clock, having put aside its redness, and taken the similitude of a veiled white splotch swimming mistily, high on its journey to the zenith, it looked down and marked the progress of that puny atom steering so boldly, careless of the signals. It said with grave assurance that the navigators would presently learn the meaning of those signals; that they would discover the anguish of a watch spent looking into the teeth of a gale; that they would have an object-lesson of its force, its immense and irresistible power on the world of ships.

Carragh came out from a lonely breakfast taken in his room, and stood a moment reading the signs. He noted them one by one. "Rain," he said, "and wind, running possibly to '8' or '9'—well, as Sammy would say, 'can do!'"

He lighted a cigarette and strolled up and down the forward end of the promenade. The sea was glassy, with an oily, heaving swell; the horizon shut in all round; it melted into the clouds—clouds which did not rise. The ship pushed through water that sizzled, broke into beads,

and left a wake of emerald and white trailing far into the murk.

In half an hour Walton would come up to relieve him. The two had arranged to take twelve-hour watches, Carragh the night, Walton the day ; that is to say, they would be about during those periods, ready in case of emergency, or should a quartermaster be sent to find them. It was the only possible solution—seeing the entanglement ; and seeing, too, that Carragh had agreed to delegate a responsibility impossible of delegation.

But before Walton arrived to give his commander the option of freedom, the ladies came up from breakfast, formed groups, sought out sheltered chairs, and marched in pairs about the snow-white deck. They talked with strident voices. Carragh glanced at them searching for Violet, the trim little quartermaster of the *Rajah* days, but as neither she nor Lady Barraclough was yet among them, he decided they were tired and had gone to bed. He wondered, too, how they would appreciate this topsyturvy business of sleeping when the sun was up and staring into the blackness when the sun slept.

Sailors are men marked by crows' feet ; he wondered whether either recognised the reason, or whether they were concerned with trifles so infantile, when, at the same time, it was evident they trafficked in problems. But he was not left long to wonder, nor to dream of days when problems had no part in the scheme of things, for Lady Jane Vereker-Tayler, sister of Lord de Bleach and daughter of a nobleman duly docketed in the peerage as the fifth Earl of Barrington, discovered the fact that he marched alone, and hastened to join him.

The tulip *motif* thrummed unheard by Carragh. He saw the approach of a lady wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, and knew she was Lady Jane, one of the most pronounced of the problemists.

She was a round-faced, plump little personage, verging possibly on forty, and of distracting enthusiasm. The Earl, her father, said she had sufficient *verve* for a Chancellor of the Exchequer ; but Lord de Bleach, her brother, declared that the nation required no more experimentalists in charge of its purse-strings, and pointed to the fact that his sister's affairs hovered perilously near the edge of bankruptcy. He instanced

her present craze, the last of a series notable chiefly for their diversity, as evidence of her lack of balance. As though any sane person, he asserted, cared two straws what became of tulips.

But Lady Jane cared, and hence she was one of those women pioneers, broom-wielders, and very vigorous workers; and hence, too, when she espied Carragh, tall, well groomed, and of easy carriage, walking alone, she moved across to join him and to interest him in her views. He was the captain, and although Honoria and the rest of them held the reins just now, she felt it would be wise to persuade him to take an interest in her wonderful bulbs; and perhaps, additionally, he might prove interesting and sympathetic—a quantity hitherto bleakly inconspicuous among any of her co-problemists.

She came over to meet him, and nodded affably in reply to his salute.

"Good morning, captain," she said in her brisk manner. "What a charming outlook!—so quiet, so unobtrusive, so *déagaté*, if one may say so after our rather stirring adventure of yesterday . . . Pray continue your smoke; I love it—my brother inured me to its virtues long ago . . . I wonder, by the way, whether you ever met him?"

She paused just long enough to allow Carragh to say that he had no recollection of the name, then broke in with—

"Oh, but that would not guide you. You see he is an elder son and takes the second title—Lord de Bleach, you know."

Carragh looked up with sudden interest, "Lord de Bleach?" he repeated. "Jove, yes—something to do with tulips, hasn't he?"

Lady Jane regarded him with benign admiration, "No, no," she corrected, "it is I who have to do with tulips—as you so funnily put it—but he is the High Commissioner for the Kingdom of Ulanda, *un grand homme*, at all events in his own estimation. Why, have you—have you met him?"

Tulips, Ulanda, *un grand homme*, especially the latter, given with an air of immense discrimination, put Carragh on his guard. The meaning of the idiotic telegram was in the hands of this dumpling lady with peach-like cheeks, and mincing manner. Excellent! He turned to her with new interest.

"No," he said, "I have never met him; but of course one has heard his name."

"*Tant mieux ! Charmant !* that makes it so much easier to talk of him—for, *entre nous*, I am trying to be very civil to him just now—for of course you recognise he could be very disagreeable to me in this *affaire* of mine, if he chose."

"*Affaire !*" Carragh glanced at the little lady beside him, and saw that she smiled and appeared very affable and peach-like and puffy. "I am afraid I am in the dark," he added.

"But of course you know of our Society, and our aim—*et toute la boutique enfin ?*" she questioned, coming to an abrupt pause.

Carragh had to admit that he was totally and stupidly ignorant and to beg for enlightenment.

"Oh, but that is *difficile—difficile*," said Lady Jane with an air of immense calm. "It takes us back to the beginning of things—*au fond*, as one might say—and I imagined you were *en rapport*—that you had been consulted, in a sense, as to which harbour we must approach and whether . . . Oh ! but this is *triste—triste vous m'avez épaté !*"

"I am sorry, believe me I had no notion——"

"*N'importe*," said the lady with a determination that left Carragh amazed. "To begin with, as I said, *au fond*, there is in London an organisation called the Royal Society for the Propagation of Tulips—and of it I am the chief, the President !"

She stood still, looking up at him like a benign and rosy cherub, manifestly awaiting his applause. But the chorus was away, and Carragh could only straighten his lips and wonder what all this led to, and what the lady navigators had to do with it; but he said, "How interesting !" then after a pause, during which the spectacles searched him twinkling, "how very interesting !"

"*Bene !*" said Lady Jane, "but I am stopping your walk. *Allons !* I, too, am fond of the promenade. Let us proceed."

"You were telling me of your society," Carragh led as he paced gravely beside the small round form and struggled to adapt his step.

"Are you interested—does it *hold* you . . . does it gr-r-rip ?" she questioned with tremendous fervour.

"I can imagine great results," Carragh asserted men-

daciously. "Of course the thing is in its infancy, as one might say, but with the help of the High Commissioner——"

"Precisely—with his help ; but *hélas!* I am unable to obtain quite that. Maps, directions, and introductions, plus malignant assertions as to the *viciousness* of the population, the *greed* of the traders, the *delinquencies* of the missionaries, and the *sterility* of the up country slopes—yes, in reams—jumbled, garbled, thrown at my head and at the head of our Society in the *guise* of advice, *tout ou rien*, but for sane help, for honest assistance, I tell you we stand alone—alone ! "

Lady Jane stood alone. She stood, indeed, with extended palms, the very embodiment of determination, and Carragh had taken several steps before he recognised the rather obvious absurdity of her pose. Then he, too, paused and doubtfully expressed the opinion that his companion had been unfairly treated, and went on to ask what the Society would do.

"Well, you see," said Lady Jane, as she moved forward once more and accompanied him to and fro along the promenade, "it has long been observed, by *savants*, of course, that tulips have not been properly treated. There is much that we don't understand yet as to their origin, while as to their characteristics—the physiological characteristics—we know nothing—nothing."

"You astonish me," said Carragh ; but he did not say in what way he was astonished, and Lady Jane accepted the tribute.

"*Par exemple,*" she went on with flowing hands, "take the stem—why is it herbaceous, and not hard and woody ? It might be either, yet, you observe, it is herbaceous. Again, why are the whorls in some species *dentate* and in others *serrate* ? . . . But I waste time, yours and mine ; the point at which we have arrived is this, and nothing less—botanists have agreed that tulips have hitherto been much neglected ; that, in point of fact, we know nothing of the possibilities of tulips, given natural environment. That is the factor, the peak which determines all species—environment—and we, as a Society, have determined to give tulips their opportunity."

"And I understand, then," Carragh remarked, "that Ulanda is the ideal spot ? "

"*Certainement !* I am told," the little lady rushed on, with beaming eyes, "that, given proper climatic conditions, there is no reason why tulips should not be made to produce blossoms as large and round as a cauliflower ; and that their colour, their marvellous gradations, their wonderful blends, can be indefinitely multiplied. Indefinitely ! Think of it. It is a great ideal, *n'est-ce pas ? C'est magnifique !*"

"I think," said Carragh with marvellous gravity considering the strain, "that you have undertaken an immense task. It is wonderful. It sounds quite—heroic."

"The very word," said Lady Jane with decision.

"And unquestionably costly," Carragh added.

"Who, my dear captain, considers cost, when the benefit of a species is on the *tapis* ? Dare we consider such a triviality ! I put it to you ?"

Carragh was careful to evade the point ; he had his own opinion on the subject, but for the moment he considered it wise to ignore it. He said "And so you and some of these la—— some of your friends, propose landing at——"

"Wherever you consider best," she returned ; "but only two of us go—two. The woman on the left, there, is my only companion."

"You are brave, my dear lady," Carragh remarked in growing astonishment, "so, too, is your friend. Is she one of your Society ?"

"Scarcely. She is Alicia Jason—a missionary ; but as we go up to the same district we travel in company."

"And what is her sphere ?" Carragh asked, greatly daring.

"Proselytising the natives. Rather waste of time," said Lady Jane with a deprecatory wave. "She will attend to the zenana branch, I believe, and distribute garments."

"Zenana !" Carragh objected. "But in Ulanda there are none—houses are non-existent."

"*Façon de parler*, my dear captain—in the accepted sense of course they are absent. Still there is a plurality *de dames* and she goes—and also she distributes garments—*que voulez vous ?*"

"What a waste of money," Carragh laughed. "What abject waste !"

"I agree," said Lady Jane, "it would have been more to her credit if she had compelled her Society to join mine ; for, after all, tulips are nearly human, while these black people are—*dites moi*—what are they, captain ?"

"Savage," Carragh jerked out.

"Precisely—while as for my pets, oh ! the word is not yet coined which describes one thousandth part of their virtues. I recognise it. I am unable to give it in words—*vraiment*, we are in possession of a language infantile—we can only sketch."

Carragh turned away to hide a smile. His companion was so terribly in earnest, she mouthed her words, accentuating them and ringing the changes of gesticulation like a born sister of the Republic. And now she looked up at him with pleading eyes, and he felt compelled to say something. He took a hasty dash at the subject, plunging in as a man dives into the sea.

"Then I understand you intend to land at some place on the West Coast, and take your—your bulbs," Carragh nearly choked at the word, "up country with you—and——"

Lady Jane mercifully strayed into the pause, taking him along with unfaltering precision. "Just so. I take my tulips and Alicia Jason takes her garments, and we proceed to sow seed—each in her own sphere. I need not tell you which I consider most likely to bear fruit, for I am nothing if not sanguine ; and of course we shall have every assistance from the Consulate, and so forth, and they will provide us with escorts and bearers—that I insisted de Bleach should promise."

"Hum !" said Carragh. "Then it seems to me I had better look up the nearest port and see if we happen to have the correct chart ; for of course you understand that it would be impossible to take the ship into a port of which we have no chart."

Lady Jane's glance fell. "Do you mean to tell me that it is possible you have not the correct chart ?"

"More than possible, Lady Jane."

"Oh, but that is *triste—triste* ! You must be joking ?"

"Indeed no. But really it is scarcely a matter for me. Lady Barraclough has doubtless made all arrangements."

"True ; and if they fail me, what will you do ?"

"Everything possible," he bowed.

"Thank you ; then I go at once to see my dear Honoria—oh ! but I am *triste—triste* !"

Carragh drew a long breath as she trotted away. "Good Lord !" he said, and he had scarcely concluded before a sigh struck his ear, and he turned to see the girl Lady Jane had pointed out as Alicia Jason, standing close beside him. She caught his eye, and said in a hollow, lack-laughter voice, "How profane !"

"I beg your pardon," Carragh interjected, "I did not know——"

"Of course you did not know," said Miss Jason, with the deliberate enunciation of a trained speaker ; "how could you have known unless you had eyes in your back ?"

Carragh raised his cap, and was about to pass on ; he felt that it was dangerous to remain any longer in that neighbourhood ; but Miss Jason divined his intention. "Before you go," she said, in her hollow voice, "will you tell me when we shall arrive at Sierra Leone ?"

Carragh replied that he had no notion ; indeed, that he did not know they were going to Sierra Leone.

"But you are the captain, are you not ?" questioned Miss Jason.

"Yes."

"Then why do you not know ?"

"Oh, because," said Carragh, driven into a corner for an explanation, and unable to find one, "because I am a fool—er—you had better ask Lady Barraclough."

He turned on his heel, and said as he did so, "Now, Carragh, my boy, that's rude," and the hollow voice of the missionary girl came back upon him, accentuating the fact, driving it home.

"Of course you are a fool," she announced ; "all men are fools. They can't help it."

Carragh stalked across the deck, and came directly upon Miss Ramsden, who laughingly approached, and instantly all thought of the tulips and Ulanda and the hollow-toned maniac passed from his mind as damp fades from a glass at the sight of the sun.

She came down the deck with that easy carriage of hers that marked her from all the women on board ; she waved her hand towards her friends on the bridge, "Let me know when it is time for sights !" she cried, then on towards Carragh, her eyes dancing, her face aglow.

"What did our dear little dumpling find to talk about? What an age she kept you, too—you can't be interested in tulips?"

"Tulips were nothing to the distributor of garments," said he. "Who is she? Is she mad?"

"Sane as you or I. Why?"

"Curious form of sanity—that's all. Oh, and as for Lady Jane, you remember I wanted to know about a certain de Bleach," he went on, revelling in the new-found sunshine. "Well, we talked about him, and I found that he is her brother."

"Of course he is. I could have told you that."

"Then, pray, why didn't you?"

"Because you failed to ask," she flashed, her eyes full of merriment. "And to tell you the truth, I don't think I connected the names for the moment—Vereker-Taylor is so——"

"Precisely—very. Well, that is why I asked you, if you care to see it." He had taken the telegram from his pocket-book and held it for her to read.

Miss Ramsden glanced through it, and looked up with sparkling eyes. "My poor Pad——" she said, then paused, suddenly crimson, and added in a small and nervous voice, "I beg your pardon—the silly *Rajah* days again, you see. Oh, really, really, how this must have worried you!"

Carragh stepped forward; he had forgotten the new environment, the moving figures, the people glancing over the bridge screen, the obvious daylight—he saw only Violet Ramsden, his girl-friend of long ago, and caught her hand in his.

"Don't, don't," he pleaded, "I love those days. I love the remembrance; it thrills with every new touch. I am living again, and you are bringing it all back. Please don't ask *my* pardon. It is——"

The small hand struggled for freedom and gained it. There was a flush on Miss Ramsden's face. Carragh caught sight of a light in her eyes, translatable easily as fear, annoyance; perhaps even anger; certainly the laughter was dead, and in its place, as a further reminder, if he needed one, came her voice, saying, in unthrilling calm—

"Well, and now you have the key to your puzzle, what use do you intend to make of it?"

Carragh had forgotten the telegram, the tulips—everything ; but at the sound of that chilling transition he came back with a leap. “ Thanks, yes. I am glad of the hint ; yes, and about the tulips—er—shall we walk a moment ? Yes ? Thanks—and what about the tulips ?—what do you advise ? ”

“ She must not go, obviously, if what her brother says is true.”

“ Then what shall I do ? ”

“ I think,” she gave back with a touch of her old manner, “ I may safely leave that to Captain Carragh’s discretion.”

“ A broken reed,” he returned gravely.

“ I don’t think so,” said the voice ; but the thrill was gone. Carragh had nothing to say.

For five minutes, for convention’s sake, they continued to pace to and fro. Miss Ramsden was quiet and very collected ; Carragh quiet and unusually vague. They each made a remark or two—found it difficult—then, with a quick nod, the girl made her escape to the bridge.

The commander continued to pace slowly up and down, listening to the comment running in his brain. “ Ass ! ass ! What the devil will she think ? ”

But Miss Ramsden, mounting the ladder, said breathlessly, “ Oh, my stupid tongue ! What will he think ? ”

The missionary girl passed up and down also, near Carragh, with a frown that should have sent him speedily for the doctor. “ Most indiscreet ! ” she announced in hollow tones. She stared at the deck.

CHAPTER X

STRAWS

SECTION I.—*The place of lavender and frills*

ON the promenade deck were two smoking-rooms : one the prim and stiff, bent-wood-seated, small-tabled, pipe-and-glass-racked sanctum of modern steamships ; the other, the "convairted" music-room of Harrison's trial—a place furnished with lounges, divans, soft cushions, sachets, a grand piano, and Turkey carpet, known already as the place of lavender and frills. The first was designed for the comfort of the lords of creation, the latter for the women who created them lords.

The rooms faced each other unblushingly on either side of the saloon entrance, and the doors leading from them stood *vis-à-vis*, with one eye closed—a point in the scheme of things Lady Barraclough had overlooked, and, so far, had not recognised.

Harrison's statement as to the number of women on board was an exaggeration; there were not fifty, but thirty, and of them, perhaps twelve might have come under the ban as "man-haters." The rest were of that skittish variety known sometimes as maids, sometimes as ladies' ladies, sometimes as nuisances—and, as far as the autocrat and her party were concerned, might have been said to be non-existent; except, of course, at necessary and well-defined moments.

Now, at 9 p.m., on the day the *Southern Cross* showed her nose hazardously in the chops of the Channel, the maids—or nuisances, which you will—were living *pari passu* with circumstance ; that is to say, a few were waited on by stewards who carried basins and beef-tea ; and a few

were attendant on mistresses who required basins and beef-tea ; and a few were flirting, or discovering opportunities for flirtation, when the weather was more considerate and mankind better known. This is as it should be in a world that blatantly advertises the fact that it has gifts and kicks to administer indiscriminately to all who seek, and that those who take up the running promptly stand best with the fickle goddess who beckons.

But it was nine o'clock, and the dim twilight, gradually creeping farther west, waned and became silvery. Half an hour ago the sky was full of portent for those who could read ; an hour ago it had shouted of what was brooding out there in the crimson and violet haze. But the ladies marching the bridge in spick-and-span gowns lavishly denoting their rank, saw only the beauty of it, the depths of the haze, the subtleties of colour, and longed to put it on canvas—to paint it, and get it “on the line” at one of the shows. The hour, however, was not propitious. The ship jumped into a head-sea that rolled up for no other apparent reason than to splash them. They could not paint. It took them all their time to stand.

Meanwhile, dinner being over, Lady Barraclough and some of her young friends were comfortably housed in the place of lavender and frills, and coffee had been served ; cigarettes were alight, too, and some of the navigators reclined in chairs in attitudes which said plainly they were alone.

Violet Ramsden appeared supremely grateful to the person who invented a long cane lounge, with wings for one's arms, and a rail to tuck one's feet against when the ship rolled. Sadie Cole seemed content to remember that it was possible to put her feet up without bothering about—ankles. Lilian Roberts looked pink and demure in a frame of lace and chiffon ; Sydney Guffles sat in a chair with her feet tucked under her—sideways ; Lucy Patterson, the dainty sixth officer, reclined as did her commander. All three held books, all three puffed delicately at cigarettes, all three looked unutterably sleepy ; only Lady Barraclough sat erect, absorbed in the pronouncements of John Stuart Mill. She frowned as she read.

Violet Ramsden, lying beside her in that gauzy transparency called a dinner-gown, with elbows at rest on the wings of her chair and her white arms and fingers

meeting V-wise above her eyes, glanced up at length and said, "It's awfully slow! I vote we have some music."

Lucy Patterson blew a cloud of smoke through a ring she had made, and chirped—"Too s'eeepy, tweet."

"Well—but I think——"

"Too comfy," Lucy accentuated with modern clippi-ness; "much too muchie comfy!"

Miss Ramsden glanced appealingly at the others, but no one moved—they reclined like tired goddesses after an early dinner, lazily comfortable, drowsily somnolent, yawning over the books they held. Violet Ramsden shook her finger into the silence, and, rising from her place, crossed to the piano. "I'll play you a dirge," she laughed; "you don't deserve it—but I will." She sat down, and commenced Tschaikowsky's solemn March.

Slowly and very finely she rendered the wonderful music, and at the end glanced over at her friends. No one listened. No one applauded or made the remotest effort at encouragement. Lady Barraclough left her in no doubt as to her feelings—she snorted; that is to say, had she been a man, the noise she made might have been so described, but—well, at all events she disliked the piano, and her hatred for strings was accepted as a craze. In addition, she was engaged frowningly on a deeper problem, and desired quiet. But the navigators had dined, and were they not smoking? Violet Ramsden smiled. She was very wide awake. She had been thinking—a most annoying trait of hers—all through dinner she had been thinking, and still the memory throbbed of those days sunk in the years when she had come down the Bay of Bengal and learned to hold the sextant and name the stars.

Something else stole across her remembrance, and she searched for the clue to its identity, her fingers moving dreamily over the keys. What was it? She played an air with plaintive touch, lingering over the notes, yet the name escaped her, only the circumstances remained—they burned. She paused abruptly and fell back on Tschaikowsky. The slow rhythm of the chords marched solemn and impressive under her firm white hand. Again she drew to the end and glanced about.

Lucy Patterson caught her eye and smiled.

"Deevie!" she whispered, and closed her eyes—but she meant "divine."

And out of the ensuing silence there came the tinkle of a banjo and a voice carolling boisterously over the pitfalls in "Knock 'em in the Old Kent Road."

Violet sat quite still. Her friends moved restlessly in their chairs; they closed their books and sat up, very wide awake now. One said, "Ripping!" and clapped her hands softly. Another said, "Good old Chevalier!" and laughed aloud at the snap of a shut book. She looked round. John Stuart Mill was lost, his arguments forgotten. Lady Barraclough was sitting erect, with the look in her eyes that must have been Betsy Trotwood's when she saw the donkey boys.

"What is that?" she demanded.

"Banjo," said Mrs. Cole.

"Ring the bell, Guffles."

Miss Guffles pressed a button and leaned back once more amidst the cushions. A steward appeared in the doorway, touching his forehead. "Yes'm?" he remarked.

"I desire to see the *chief* steward," said Lady Barraclough. "Send him at once."

The lad vanished, and Lady Barraclough fumbled for her starers, without which she never faced an interview. She watched for the door to reopen. The air was electric. Somewhere in the neighbourhood a banjo thrummed, and the "Old Kent Road" rolled to its close amidst a storm of "Bravos!" There were no signs of drowsiness when the steward appeared, for Lady Barraclough's starers were lifted.

"Who is making that noise?" she demanded.

"Noise, my lady?"

"Banjo," Sadie Cole explained laconically.

"That? Oh, that's the officers in the smoke-room, miss."

"What smoking-room?—and where?"

"Across the lobby, my lady—the other side of the saloon staircase."

"That is a passengers' smoking-room. It belongs to my accommodation," Lady Barraclough announced.

"It did, my lady, but now you've made the officers passengers they have the use of it—in fact, they generally use it at other times."

"I don't think we can be speaking of the same room. Open the door and let me see," Lady Barraclough ordered.

The steward obeyed, and standing back, pointed—"There, my lady."

The autocrat focussed her starers and sat erect a moment in thought. Then the chorus of a new song broke upon the silence. Again Chevalier's; again a coster's ditty, and sung with a lilt in the vernacular. The words of the last two lines filtered through plainly—

"Do I love yer?
Lor, lumme! I could eat yer."

The steward put up his hand to hide a smile, and some of the navigators laughed outright; but Lady Barraclough took it as a personal affront and said, angrily—

"Go across at once and put a stop to that vulgarity. I won't permit it."

The steward hesitated.

"I daren't, my lady," he expostulated. "Why, it's the officers!"

"Have the goodness to obey my orders, sir."

"With all deference, my lady, if you put it like that, I must refuse. It's more than my billet's worth. Why, the captain's there as likely as not."

"Well?"

"Well, you must see, my lady, I can't order the captain."

Miss Ramsden rose from the piano at this and crossed over to stand beside her friend. "Do you think it is necessary?" she asked softly. "Don't you think we might close our own door?"

"I object to the banjo, Violet, and Chevalier is anathema."

"I don't agree . . . I think he is very clever." She motioned to the steward, who vanished at once. "But we mustn't put people's backs up . . . we—"

"Pardon. He is vulgar—hopelessly vulgar," Lady Barraclough asserted. "Vulgarity and irreverence are the characteristic features of modern life; even you, as witness your phrase just now, are imbued with it. Very well—anything, or anybody that panders to these phases is an abomination."

"Very well, dear . . . we have spoken before on that subject ; still, I can't help thinking it is a pity, you know, to insult people because they sing coster songs to a banjo accompaniment. What do you say, girls?"

"I vote we ask them to join us," said the sprightly Mrs. Cole. "It would be no end of fun."

"Ripping!" cried Lilian Roberts, while the gentle sixth officer murmured, "Idyllic!"

Lady Barraclough allowed her starers to hang at her waist. She glanced from one to the other of her companions, noted the hidden laughter and sudden accession of gaiety, and rose slowly from her chair. "Violet," she said with an almost imperceptible sigh, "I begin to wish we had never come this voyage."

She moved past the other girls without notice and walked grimly to the stairs. Inside the smoking-room the tinkle of the banjo went on, but the rhythm had changed, and a chorus now alternated with each verse. Lady Barraclough entered her cabin and closed the door. Violet Ramsden took up her cloak, and buttoning it tightly about her neck, went out into the darkness to the bridge ; but Sadie Cole lit another cigarette, and poising her feet nicely on the seat of a chair, said—

"I don't know, but it seems to me we are just beginning to find ourselves . . . guess we'll have that door open."

SECTION 2.—*The place of bent-wood seats and tittle.*

Across the lobby the banjo tinkled, and Peter Lovatt, the second officer, standing with a glass held high, led off his "turn" at a round of "Nurseries."

"He sat in the old armchair,
And Zilla, his queen, was there ;
He picked up a horsehair
And said it was her hair—
That silly young man in the chair."

"Strings! Strings! Go it . . . your turn, Strings!" cried the audience after the chorus had waned and only the banjo could be heard.

Strings, otherwise Carl Hannen, the purser, sat back, and gave vent to what lay nearer his heart—"Shentlemen!" he said, "I vish at onze to put it to the——"

"Oh! shut up, Strings . . . pass him there and put it down."

"Putting it down" on this occasion meant fiz for the first dinner they gave, so Strings complied with a nasal twang that was as remarkable as was his pronunciation—

"You tink I am Juggings, my dear?
You forget it's the bursar sits here,
That he's seek off zese ladies
Andt asks for his vages—
For the voyage may blace heim—town there!"

He pointed tragically at the deck, and a roar of laughter drowned the chorus at the action. Strings had escaped, and he smiled through his glasses and twisted the ends of his moustache into death-dealing points. He looked very fierce, but in a moment there was a lull, and into it crept the voice of Billy Rathbone, the dapper third officer. He sang with feeling—

"There was a young man of Crew
Who came home one day in a stew,
He crawled up the stair
On feet that were bare—
And flogged his wife with her shoe."

"Good old Billy!" The room yelled approval, and fell with one voice on the chorus—

"Oh, the elephant walks around,
The band begins to play,
The silly young geese go quack, quack, quack—
And the donkey shouts haw-hay!"

The doctor, with an accent quite unmistakably Irish, followed in a deep bass—

"There was a young man of New York
Who dhressed himself in a cork,
Sez he, 'Who would think it?
But it's right as a trivet,
This dhress I have made from a cork."

They were in the middle of the chorus, shouting brazenly of the geese who quack, quack, quack, when the door opened, and Wo-sun, the captain's servant, appeared in the gap.

"Please, seh," he remarked, clucking and straining his neck like a hen—"please seh, La'y Ballaclup say kinee makee less damn lacket . . . no can go sleepee one time——"

A book caught the edge of the door and the Chinaman sprang back grinning.

"Come here, Sammy . . . come here, my son!" cried the chief.

Sammy obeyed with hands held ready to intercept any further missals, and stood waiting within the room.

"Shut the door," said the chief.

Again Sammy knew better than to disobey, but his eyes were screwed into thin slits between fear and laughter.

"Did Lady Barraclough give you that message, Sammy?"

"No, seh."

"Then who did?"

"Don't know, seh."

The chief glanced at his companions and said, "Tail, there, Peter! Toby! Billy! spread-eagle him and get me my rattan."

Sammy, a whirl of blue and white garments, was quickly caught and placed across a table. The doctor came over and stood beside him, watch in hand. He felt his pulse with intense gravity and said, "Fifty won't hurt him . . . he's young."

Sammy howled.

"Good," said the chief. "Now then, my son—out with it. Who gave you that message?"

"Don't know, seh."

"One!" said the chief, and the purser laid on a sounding smack with the sole of a slipper.

"Oh!" said Sammy.

"Two-o-o," the chief drawled.

"All light . . . all lightee! I tell——"

"Speak up, then . . . two-o-o——"

"Firs' saloon stooard, seh."

"Ah! Then he will get spread-eagled, Sammy."

Sammy considered, then remarked with an awkward twist, "But he get it flom number one bedloom stooard, seh."

"Good; then he'll get spread-eagled too. Doc, we're going to be busy."

The Chinaman reflected further, then in a muffled voice cried out, "But he get it ffrom . . . Silly Ha'gleave, seh."

"Who is Silly Hargreaves?"

"Lä'y Ballaclup maid, seh."

"Oh!" said the chief.

"No can splead-edle Silly Ha'gleave, seh . . . She nice gell . . . blue eye . . . large!" Sammy clucked out the explanation with difficulty, craning his neck to watch the slipper.

The chief pulled at his moustache, and a smile crept over his bronzed face. "No," he said, "we can't spread-eagle Silly Hargreaves . . . Get up. Clear out!"

Peter released his tail and the other men stepped back, while Sammy made a zigzag course for the door. Arrived there, he turned about with his widest grin, "That all light," he said; "now no one get splead-edle."

"Euchred!" said the doctor tragically.

"It's checkmate," the chief asserted. "Lady Barraclough wins."

But the doctor turned the tables on this. "What is it to be?" he cried in his big voice. "Are we men or are we slaves? Is Lady Barraclough to rule us and order us and tuck us in our little beds at night as though we were Germans, or are we going to kick?"

"Kick," said Toby Slade, in virtue of being the youngest officer present.

"Good," said the doctor; "but how?"

"Sit on her," Peter suggested with a twinkle, "as the bo'sun sat on her a while ago."

"Go on, what's that? Let's have it," cried the audience with heaving sides.

Peter took up the attitude of one telling a tale and waved his cigar. "The old 'un," said he, "had been lecturing the bo'sun on what he calls vulgarity; and she objected strongly to certain forms of speech friend Jenks considers indispensable. But Jenks isn't a fool, so he saluted and moved aside. Then by and by up comes the old 'un again, and, says she, 'My man, what is that ship doing over there?'"

"The bos'un looked up and said, 'Beg pardin, my lady, but that's not a ship . . . it's a barque.'"

"Well, and what is that barque doing over there," says the old 'un.

“‘She’s bin goin’ about an’ now she’s in stays . . . leastways she’s in cossets, m’lady—cossets.’”

The house roared, and Toby Slade broke into the Shell-back ditty with a deft turn of the banjo—

“If you want to know, how the ship does go,
 Take a squint,
 Take a squint
 Right down into the hold,
 But if you want to find how soon the fires can blind,
 Take a rake,
 Take a rake,
 And work it like the Shaitan till you’re old.”

“Von minute!” cried a great voice. “I von toast do brobose haff.” A tall man with a huge torpedo beard and long moustache was on his feet hammering at the small table—

“Shentlemans andt laties!” he began, then stopped, put on his pince-nez, and recommenced, “Navigading officers andt shentlemans!”

“Hear, hear!” cried the house; “go it, Hannen—give it ’em, Strings.”

“I vill,” said Strings, “for zis is an hisdronic ocasion andt we mustd nod allow id to bass. Shentlemans, ve are dold to make less dam racket! That an insuld is; . . . id stands for fight; . . . id stands for ze peginning of var—hein? Goodt. Now I vill look at the bosition. Ve acree to vork this sheep—ve sign on andt ve do the breliminary ganter, andt then ve are toldt ve are the guests of zis old von. But zay gonsider it onsave, andt so they give do us silly vaistcoats. . . . I vare von, you vare von, ve all vare von. If ve like ve plow them out andt ve are fat, mein Gott! fat like puttings. So! Ve vare the vaistcoat, zay vare the frog; zay pull the strings, ve do the danze—ve cannod go to bed pecause of the tainger of id—ve must nod sing pecause of the noise of id . . . bueno! Life is nod vorth ids saldt . . . is id? I ask you—is id?”

Loud cries of “No, no—go it Strings. . . . Give ’em socks.”

“No,” said the purser, with a tug at his moustache, “I do nod giff them socgs—but I zare health brobose. Ve drink to them who rule—hein? Andt vy? Pecause do-morrow, if ve do nussings now, ve may be *pod pourri* . . .

ad sum . . . non estd. R.I.P . . . vat you vill—but perhaps floating aboutd in our liddle din vaistcoads andt offering our nezzer garmends do the dender gums of ze shark. Shentlemans, if ve do nussing, do-morrow ve may pe gedding nipped py the sbortive albacore, py the bonito ; ve may pe gedding punched in the faze py flying fish, collared on the doe py crab or encircled in the vasdt embraze of that giant off giands—ze ogdopus. I do not like ze ogtopus. He is nod a sing to faze in cold plood—he is not a sing to faze without a trink—but out there, there vill be no trinks . . . no soap to vash our liddle faze—nuddings. So I bropose the health of this Laty Barracouta, andt I say—may she fall in loff andt tie in her sdays . . . may she catch a crab ven she is looking for a neetle . . . may she marry a tartar andt repent in Hates . . . may she——”

Strings was beginning to wander and look vicious, so the House pulled him up. “Hold hard, Strings! Mop it up, Strings!” they cried, remembering the fact that the glasses waited.

“I vill,” said Strings, and he performed the “two-move, gulp,” and set down an empty glass. The doctor was the only other man present who could emulate him. He did so and the purser resumed—

“Shentlemans,” he pulled his moustache into horn-like points, “ve must zes laties saircomvendt. Id is not goodt to pe floating about in our liddle din vaistcoads——”

“Indiarubber, Strings! Indiarubber,” cried the chief.

“Intiarupper or gasd iron, I haff no tesire to pe afloat in id,” said the purser with grim meaning, “neither haff I any tesire to pe at loggerhets with the ogtopus. I say id is onvise to tingle-tangle our nezzer garmends in the sea vor to dantalise the ogtopus. I my nezzer garmends vant, hein? So to you . . . goodt, then I say——”

“Sit down, Strings, you’ve said it. Sit down.”

“I sit town ven I juse . . . I sit town ven I gome——”

“Good old Strings! Keep it up!”

“You rag me? Goodt! Put I am not ragged—I pud it to you—that I tesire nod to pe in the grip of the ogtopus. You may cut off the arm of an ogtopus, you may cut off forty arms, put the shentleman vith the von big eye sdares up andt says nuddings. Put he finds another arm, andt you go town quick into the vite tube of

heim, andt you are—vat? *Pod bourri . . . hodch-podch ad sum . . . non esdt . . .*" He paused with uplifted shoulders asking visibly and theatrically, "What?" The house roared, and in the following lull Toby Slade insinuated his banjo, singing to a minor chant and running accompaniment—

"Gone to glory—gone to Moses,
Twanging harps with cherry noses;
Gone to Isaac Watts's hymn-land,
Finding prickles in the new Strand.
Poor old Shellbacks!
Mark them, Sonnies,
Plodding slowly cap in hand."

The men took up the hint, singing with a lilt that drowned expostulation, and at the end, in spite of the laughter, the purser cried out—

"It musd finish. Ve must this laty saircomvendt——"

"Shut up!" said one.

"Go home!" cried another.

"Ye've said that already," the doctor reminded.

"So? Vell—find for me a blan by vitch these vimen no longer the legs of us pull, andt I feenish."

"Good," said the fourth officer. "I will."

"You . . . how?"

Toby Slade lighted a cigar and rolled it in his lips.

"Marry 'em," he said.

The purser sat down amidst a roar of laughter that made the glasses jingle. He pulled at his moustache, and tilting his cap over one eye, came to a decision. "It a new taught is," he said. "Goodt . . . I vill."

In the place of lavender and frills, Sadie Cole looked up and said, "They seem to be a good sort over there. I vote we mix."

In the place of bent-wood seats and tippie, some one opened the door and stood aghast. "Great Scot!" he cried. "The navigators have their gate open."

Through the black night outside, a rising gale hummed mournfully in the rigging.

CHAPTER XI

LADY BARRACLOUGH'S REPORT

"STEWARD!"

"Yes'm—coming'm."

The man arrived, saw the autocrat, and bowed. "Yes, my lady," he added deferentially.

"Where is Hargreaves, my maid?"

"In the glory-hole, my lady, with Mrs. Dean, the stewardess."

"The glory-hole?"

"Beg pardon, my lady—steward's quarters," the man explained.

Lady Barracrough frowned. "Give things and places their right names," she said, "and now go and send Hargreaves to me. I have rung twice but can get no reply."

The steward departed, and Lady Barracrough returned to her room. She seated herself before a small table and drummed nervously with her fingers. Lady Barracrough was annoyed. She repeated the phrase—glory-hole—and found no comfort in it. It savoured of vulgarity; of that tinkling banjo and droned coster song which had so marred her evening's study. "Glory-hole!" it might have been a Salvation Army barracks; but apparently it was where the stewards lived, and Hargreaves, her maid, was down there. She had horrible notions as to what might be caught in such a place, and had almost decided to lay the onus of any complications on the back of mankind, when the girl appeared, smiling and obviously unsoiled.

Lady Barracrough taxed her immediately. "I desire to know where you have been," she said. "I rang several times but received no answer. Why is this?"

"I'm sorry, my lady. I thought you wouldn't want me before the usual time, and so, as I had an invitation——"

"An invitation?" Lady Barraclough questioned. "Do they issue invitations here?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Where?"

"To the stewardess's room, my lady."

"Any men there?"

"No, my lady."

"Where else did you go?"

"Into the glory-hole, my lady."

My lady was mollified, but she emphasised her objection. "A most pernicious place, Hargreaves. Was it clean—clean?"

"Oh yes, my lady; why, you might have eaten off the floor!"

"Thank you," came the uncompromising voice, "I prefer a plate. Any men there?"

"No, my lady—at least, there *was* the Chinese boy."

"A man in years; but he doesn't count?"

"No, my lady."

"And so, you didn't stay, eh, Hargreaves?"

"No, my lady."

"I thought not. No, none of us will remain now where mankind is not. Nature abhors a vacuum. Life without mankind is a vacuum. Put two chips apart in a bath of water, and what happens, Hargreaves? You don't know? Well, I will tell you. They draw together. Put two persons in a desert and they will fraternise; but if one happens to be a man and the other a woman, they will end by founding a colony. It is a law against which it seems impossible to make any kind of headway. We gravitate towards mankind as a stone gravitates to the lap of Mother Earth. Man is the magnet, we are the needles; but, unlike a magnet, man has but one pole; he never repels the needles; he attracts—always attracts, ruins, tears, kills. Be very careful, Hargreaves, how you approach the lap of this magnet."

"Yes, my lady."

A demure, soft-voiced maiden this, with the gift of smoothing troublous times and glancing over ethical difficulties; a come-day, go-day, kiss-me-now, if-you-want-me-

to-morrow, sort of maiden, who knew precisely how to work the autocrat. And her reward—well, at this moment Lady Barraclough sighed, and said—

"Well, well, I am sorry I disturbed you. Still, I want my writing materials, my desk and journal. And as I also want quiet, you may set the table and leave me."

In five minutes Lady Barraclough had her desire, and Hargreaves crept away to make new discoveries in a field of science quite prolific of adventure. On her lips was a word that looked like—stupid—and in her mind was a reflection; which shall it be? the glory-hole and the Chinese *boy*, or the lee of a skylight and the bo'sun's arm?

Inside the room the autocrat opened her desk, and, selecting some sheets, addressed in her bold handwriting to

"The Right Honourable

"The Earl of STAFFERLY K.C.B.,"

she headed a fresh page with the date and the words—"In Channel," and fell to her task.

"I begin to think," she wrote, "that you were right and I am wrong. It is difficult to admit it wholly at this stage; yet I am face to face with several indications which can scarcely be evaded if my report is to be worth the paper on which it is written.

"When a girl comes to you in answer to a summons, and exhibits—(1) A flushed face; (2) dancing eyes; (3) a tremulous manner; (4) a desire to equivocate; (5) the mark of the beast upon an apron that was spotless an hour before—I ask you, is not the presumption in favour of an interrupted interview; a hugger-mugger match? Necessarily, you will say. I agree. It is *prima facie* evidence. Well, that is one of the indications to which I alluded; the others are, perhaps, more subtle, but they exist. Alas! they exist.

"I think I told you somewhere in these pages of the unfortunate *contretemps* which has done so much to put us at a disadvantage. I mean the advent of Captain Carragh and the new officers. Well, it transpires that in addition to the appalling circumstance that Violet Ramsden knew Captain Carragh some time when she was a chit in teens, he turns out to be the son of Sir Walter Carragh—the Carragh of Gladstone's last Administration! And, worse

still, the officers are all gentlemen. I don't use the term in its snobbish sense, as you will guess, but for lack of some word to emphasise the fact that they are not of the usual brood—h-less, declamatory young men in uniform.

"The result is what Sadie Cole elegantly describes as a 'dead cert. ;' the girls are agog to know them. They take every opportunity of putting themselves forward, and this evening matters culminated in a suggestion made by *la belle* Cole, that we should invite them to join us, in what I try to speak of as the drawing-room, but which our party have made into a veritable smoking-room. Violet tells me distinctly that I have no right to *insult* persons who are in every way my equal! Oh this democracy! It has no thought, no feeling, no respect. It marches—it vibrates—it shouts! It knows nothing of gentleness, womanliness—it is *bizarre*. By the way, as I am on the subject, just find out for me why Carragh *père* is not on speaking terms with his son.

"You will perceive, my dear brother, by this, that I did not exaggerate my opening sentence to-night. I foresee difficulties. I foresee intrigue, perhaps even love-making. The shadow haunts me like a nightmare. I wish I had accepted your staid advice, and allowed these women navigators to fight their own battle. I was prepared to help them, and hoped that by doing so I might perhaps forward by a stage the destinies of woman—but I was not prepared for slang. I was not prepared for smoke, for indecorous attitudes, nor for *risqué* talk. It came upon me as a surprise. Mind, I omit Violet and Guffles from this indictment of hatefulness. Guffles is staunch—a good fighter; Violet is womanly and very lovable. But the others! Language fails me. They are hoydens—hoydens! They ogle the men. They are jealous of each other. They gravitate—and towards sailors!

"I call the gods to witness my aim has never been directed seaward. I have recognised the handicap Nature has seen fit to impose upon us; I have recognised the more arbitrary handicap imposed by man and convention. Still, these young friends of mine, who are now so thorny a problem, were so keen, so full of resentment at the bigotry of the Board of Trade, that I could not refuse to give them my aid. And now! Weathercocks! Scatter-brains! Fools! My dear brother, remember my limita-

tions. If I were a man I should probably swear ; as I am of the sex, I sit and write silly adjectives. How, I ask you, am I, one woman amidst thirty, to prevent the gravitation which is inevitable ? On this side is a crew of perhaps ninety or a hundred men ; on that, twenty-nine marriageable women. Pretty women. It will be a raffle ! There may even be bloodshed. I am appalled at the knowledge that on me lies the onus of having developed this holocaust. Think of it—six months, perhaps twelve ! But no, Nature declines a further concession—any extension they require beyond the six stipulated months, I wash my hands of. They may go with *la belle* Cole.

“The weather is becoming boisterous, and a minute since I heard the shrill whistle of the bo’sun. Presently, doubtless, there will be a hurricane of orders, most of which, I confess, are as Greek to me ; so it goes on. Day by day—a whistle, shouts, a troop of strangely fat-bodied sailors tripping across the deck ; more shouts. Something has been done ; something has been hauled ; something has stirred the blood of our friends, and they are happy in their new environment.

“But at the moment, I fancy there is something unusual . . . something——”

CHAPTER XII

RAIN, MIST, AND FLYING SPRAY

S. 52° W.

A black night with thin, driven rain licking about the masts and funnels, the houses and bridge, with a dull, soft patter ; falling here in a halo of steam, there hissing on the hot fiddleys, there cold on the white faces of the watch—everywhere pattering, pattering with the voice of hurled shot. High aloft a gleam of radiance, flung out, white and staring upon the clouds, and discovering twin strips of stay in its passage ; on either hand a blur of coloured spray, blended, wonderful to see—on this side red, like blood ; on that green, like the dim fires over a kiln.

And through it, leaping buoyantly as a steeplechaser, shaking spray clouds from her head, the *Southern Cross*, scintillating at the bows, fiery all down her throbbing sides, with a brush of fire beads hissing in her wake ; the *Southern Cross* with her signal lamps blazing, driving over an arm of the vast sea we call the Channel, a sea turbulent, profound, and now invisible. Except in the form of spray it did not exist ; except from the intangible tangibility of knowledge it was not there. A glance over the bridge screens revealed blackness—the blackness of a pit, empty, void, slashed with rain—yet out there scores of vessels moved.

The watch crept about in the drizzle like black ghosts on a darkened stage.

Two bells.

Somewhere in the shadows a voice carolled, " Lights bright and all's well ! " and retired again to brood upon the fact. The sound rolled down the decks, and, as though in answer or refutation, cynically inserted, a stifling and acrid smell stole into the blackness. Smoke.

The smoke of an unseen steamer, pushing through a halo of it, and like a sullen and weary denizen of the slums, advertising his presence by the smell of vile tobacco. The watch stared. The nest sniffed, but the gong made no suggestion, and the officers continued their walk with bunched shoulders. It was wet. The rain drove. They saw nothing.

Yet out there in the spume and mist a steamer slouched with her shoulder to the wall, holding a smashed nose. She reeled by unseen, unheard, undreamed of ; a thing silent and mysterious as a ghost ; hiding her paltry equipment, her tired crew, her skinflint owners, the ghastly business from which she scuttled, in a shroud of her own weaving. Smoke enveloped her. Smoke hid her. She was the centre of it ; a thing escaping with her tongue in her cheek, pitifully mauled.

Rain, mist, and flying spray.

The watch bunched ; the nest silent. Three bells ! Again the cry of "All's well !" and a sarcastic smile on the face of the solitary in his eyrie as he gave voice to his opinion—"so fur !" Again the tiresome and nonsensical business of standing to listen to the reports of men who have not watched because they lacked the inspiring push of supervision. "All's well in the saloon !" they said ; "all's well on the main deck . . . on the poop deck . . . in the till of the captain's shaving-box." Good, good ; thank goodness ! Shuffling figures escaped from the bridge, growling audibly of the weather, and Lucy Patterson, free once more of saluting and saying "Thank you," returned to watch the compass and try to keep dry.

Weariness, rain, and mist.

Pish-h-h . . . what a night ! Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea ? The man in the nest threw the question forth at a venture, and concentrated his attention on the blackness.

Something out there drew an arc of fire across the sky, and the nest accentuated the fact that he saw with triple strokes. Ahead ! he emphasised.

It was half-past one, and Sydney Guffles, of the Scandal Society in charge, with Lucy as her aid, her navigator, to con the compass and growl in feminine language at the difficulty of seeing. The gong spoke. Lucy had seen the will-o'-the-wisp gleam, and searched to know why—why

it had disappeared. It *was* a gleam. It sizzled crookedly low down where there should be an horizon, but where now was just a void—black, tense, solid. She moved towards her companion and said—

"Whatever kind of light was that? . . . Did you see it?"

And Sydney Guffles behind the dodger said, "Yes, it's lightning."

"Then it's horrid," Miss Patterson announced. "I vote we send for Violet."

"I vote we don't."

"I'm no good in a thunderstorm," Lucy explained with tightening lips.

"Oh, screw up your nerves. . . . You'll have to get used to it."

"Can't—can't—can't! Not an atom, not the least atom of use . . . none there," Lucy emphasised; then added, "Oh! there it is again."

A flaring signal spanned the sky like a phosphorus match drawn suddenly across a board. It sizzled and went out. The gong beat out rythmically, "There, there, there!" and Miss Guffles examined the horizon with her night glasses. She might with equal point have stared into the black throat of the funnels belching smoke and sparks behind her, but she preferred to face the rain. It wept upon the lenses. They were blurred—blurred as was the horizon, the sea, the sky. Sydney Guffles saw nothing and said so.

"But you must answer the gong, Lucy," she advised, "or we shall have them dinging at us all night. The gong is a nuisance, so is the man in the nest. I shall get Violet to dispense with him. We had no man in the nest in the Solent. We were perfectly well able to see without a man. It is absurd. I shall——"

"Beg pardon, miss," said a voice close in her ear, "but that there racket's main close—main close. It's a racket, missy—a racket."

Miss Guffles wheeled about and discovered one of the dumpling-shaped sailors at her side. His face was very near hers; he stared at her with eyes that popped; his breath scented the air like a bone factory, and his jaw moved slowly as though he were chewing the cud. Miss Guffles kept a stiff front and faced him.

"Hum! . . . ah!" she said, "yes. . . . Well, what of it?"

She was uncertain of his meaning ; how to spell the word ; whether he suggested racket or raquet—and if it were either. Well, it could scarcely affect their march through space. She said as much.

The man spouted like an evil fountain. "A racket's a racket," he announced sourly, "an' if it's not a bugle call it's a signal, an' requires seein' to. You pass 'er if you dare ! I'm Bill Smiff. Look at me"—he tapped his dumpling upper works and went on—"I says it. That's a racket. Him as passes a racket ain't werf touchin' wiv the tail end of a crowbar. I says it."

"Bless the man ! What are you talking about ?" Miss Guffles questioned very stiffly. Then, as a hint that he wished to offer advice dawned upon her, she bristled, red and angry as a turkey, and said, "Go down ! How dare you ? . . . Go down immediately ! Lucy, send the quartermaster for Violet at once. Go down, SIR !"

The man retreated, muttering and full of subtle invective, to the edge of the ladder. Here he paused, a strange and nebulous figure, and shook his fist at the navigators.

"Mind !" he asserted, "I've telled yer. . . . You go by if yer dare . . . wiv yer, 'Go down, sir !'" He passed, growling, into the void.

"Another of your men !" Miss Guffles sneered.

"Mine ?" Lucy laughed. "I like that."

"The cowards ! Relying on brute force when we're . . . Oh ! I wish I were a man or a horse just for ten minutes, I would——"

"What, dear ?"

But Miss Guffles had lost sight of her argument in the presence of an undoubted signal—a thing that flared to the zenith and burst with a chain of blue and red balls. She seized her friend's arm, crying out—

"Look ! What can that be for ?"

Miss Patterson, suddenly serious too at the sight of it, replied at once—

"Oh, Syd ! he meant r-o-c-k-e-t—rocket."

"Well ?"

"Well, but it's a signal of distress. The Hibernian said so, I remember."

"Fiddlesticks !" Miss Guffles snapped. "They fire rockets for lots of things—pilots, birthdays, ships that wish to report . . . oh, everything. Do get Violet called."

"Can't. The man with the conscientious objection to calling females is in the wheelhouse. What shall we do? I daren't ask him."

A squall of wind and rain raced down upon them, black, impenetrable. Miss Guffles stared into the teeth of the raving night and had an inspiration.

"It ought to have been decided. . . . Call the bo'sun," she replied, regardless of the laws of coherency.

Lucy gave the signal, and from somewhere in the maelström came an answer, "T'whit!" To Lucy Patterson it sounded as the bugles must have sounded to the relieved at Ladysmith or Lucknow. She thrilled, and decided that she did not care to continue this rather stupid experiment. She would like to go to bed and get warm. Her mackintosh had cost pounds, but it was wet through. The rain had managed to trickle down her hair and her neck was wet. There is nothing more demoralising than a wet neck, and Lucy objected keenly. It was uncomfortable; it spoiled one's complexion, and if one's complexion were spoiled . . . what remained? Obviously somebody's enamel. Lucy acknowledged it with a shudder, and approached her friend.

"Look here, Syd," she expostulated, "I didn't bargain for this. I don't think it's all beer and skittles being a sailor, do you?"

"No. But I have a yacht, and I'm going to show them women *can* navigate as well as men," Miss Guffles threw out crosswise into the rain.

"It's different on a yacht. I liked that . . . but this is abominable. Just look at my face!"

"Can't see . . . and, oh! don't bother. What are they doing over there now . . . and why doesn't the bo'sun come . . . or Violet? Lucy! Can't you speak? What is that light thing for. Is it a ship . . . and what shall we do?"

Lucy stared at this new trial, and saw a flare blazing where just now all had been darkness and mist and rain. It shone in bluish patches outlining a vessel or a house or a hull . . . or the ghost of a hull; but something blurred, indefinite, intangible, and astonishingly near. Lucy decided it was another fishing fleet, and told her companion they would be run down and sunk and drowned—but which would be the sinker and which the sunk, did not appear.

Suddenly she threw dignity to the gale and raced to the wheelhouse to question the quartermaster.

"What is it?" she rapped out. "What ought we to do . . . and *please* will you be so kind as to forget your conscientious objections, and call Violet?"

Some one laughed gruffly in a corner, but the man at the wheel said—

"All right, missy. We won't hit her . . . I'll see to that. It's a wessel in distress, seemin'ly. Ring up the en-gines, missy, an' go dead slow."

Lucy Patterson, a wisp of hair flicking wet and miserable at her soft cheek, and spouting a slow stream that trickled down, down to her waist, crossed the bridge and obeyed. A moment later she returned to the window and asked again: "And now . . . and now?"

"Nothin', missy . . . don't get skeared. It's all right, but get that there Lady Barracouta up an' give her a taste of it, it'll do her good. There's nothin' so good as rain, or a hose, fer swelled heads. An'," he added confidentially, "my chum got hold of the bo'sun an' sent him to roust out our skipper. There's a boatin' job ahead of us, an' you'll——"

"Starboard!" came the voice of Miss Guffles from the wing of the bridge. "Starboard hard! and Lucy! What *has* happened to the engines. I believe they are going to stop."

"They are stopping. At least, they are only going very slowly. I stopped them," said Lucy.

"Then you had no right to. I am the senior officer of the watch. Go on 'full speed ahead' please, and starboard four points."

"I shall d-d-d-do nothing of the k-k-k-kind," Lucy chattered, "I-I-I am not tired of life, and I won't be run down."

"Lucy! If you will insist on making a laughingstock of us, I shall——"

"What?" Lucy inquired truculently.

"Cry," said Miss Guffles, and turned on her heel.

Lucy followed and put her arm about her waist—a wet, wet waist it was too—and said, "Don't, there's a dear, or I'll laugh, and then they'll say it's hysterics . . . oh, Syd! don't be cross. I forgot about the senior officer—and—and, it's ever so much safer stopped."

The bo'sun's whistle sounded shrilly, and his voice shouting some absurd string of words came up through the turmoil; but Miss Guffles took no heed; she turned on her companion with a small accession of dignity and said, "You are a little coward! Lucy, I'm ashamed of you."

"And you would be a coward too if—if the water had run down your neck . . . and . . . and it couldn't get any farther. I felt like a nurse at a hydro. I'm in a pack to my waist."

Miss Guffles looked up grimly. "I'm wet to my knees," she answered.

"Are you, dear?" Lucy smiled. "I have none. I'm walking on my pack."

The ship strayed on like a lost soul; she plunged and rolled scupper deep in the brine, and the gale flicked little jets of water across her, as though it would remind her of its appalling strength, and that this was play—trifling; a mother with her child at the edge of the sea.

Then out of the new-born silence came the pipes, and a shout from the bo'sun, "All hands! All hands on deck! Tumble up . . . lively's the word!" and the sound of scurrying feet.

Miss Guffles stared at her friend. No one had ordered the bo'sun or any one else to call all hands. She could not understand it. It must be the result of another of Lucy's freaks. The girl had no more nerve than a rabbit. She crossed over and said—

"This is your doing again, I suppose. Whatever is the matter? I am the officer of the watch. I will not have this meddling . . . it's——"

"Oh, don't bother. It's Violet and Captain Carragh . . . and we've got to p-p-put the b-b-boats out!"

CHAPTER XIII

ARMA VIRUMQUE CANO

THE *Southern Cross* lay pawing the waves and breathing noisily through distended nostrils. The steam knew nothing of halt ! way enough ! or any other signal crying for rest ; it rushed up the escapes with a roar, died, leaped out again, died—gave off silly, bubbling groans, and shouted its troubles with the voice of an imprisoned giant.

Lady Barraclough said it was pandemonium, and ordered a passing quartermaster to request the chief engineer to "stop that din, or to. . . ." The steam bawled upon the sentence and overwhelmed it. It drowned the reply, too, and for a moment the quartermaster and Lady Barraclough appeared like two insane marionettes, opening their mouths and gesticulating without speech. Then the man fled, and the autocrat stood alone, inquiring darkly of the shadows, "Will no one silence that ?"

In the engine-room men were struggling with levers, closing and opening valves, shouting brazen orders at the band of stokers sweating far below on the iron foot-plates. The engineers swore, stokers swore, trimmers swore ; for a ship cannot be brought suddenly to a halt without opinions being exchanged in the land of fire and steam and groaning pistons.

On deck it was black and the rain drove pitilessly.

Carragh was there, so were his officers—men but recently emerged from "Limericks" and programmes in the smoking-room ; the crew were there, waiting with lifted collars at "boat stations." But nothing followed. No orders came. They waited. Bill Smiff was among them, standing rope in hand, and advising all who came near of his prowess. "Chuckle-headed fools !" he growled, "if

you were o' my way of thinkin' ye'd put a stopper on 'er capers—lydy or no lydy. I sez it. You mind? But they didn't go pawst . . . oh no—I stopped that—see?"

No one heeded. The little man, more pudding-like than ever, spat in his hands and gripped the "fall." "Say when!" he roared. But no word came. No one heard.

Just to leeward of them, lying splay and riven in the blackness like an overturned coster's barrow, and lighted with flares to mark her struggles, was the second half of the tragedy, the first of which had swept past unheeded. This half bled. It had received injury in the vital midship section, and was dying. It shed timbers unceasingly. The sea hissed under its new load.

Away in the gulf some one bawled for aid. Across that leaping chasm of black water, and thrown into bold relief by a flare that spluttered at the break of the poop, was a cluster of people waving arms; they looked like a troupe of marionettes ambling about a lime-lit stage. Now and again the faint echo of a shout was noticeable, and once the cry of a child.

The men clutching boat-tackle falls swore blindly as they stared.

There were women there! Women, and they waited for orders. People were drowning. They stood idle, like a Sunday School treat, one said, ogling a new shop window. Bill Smiff discovered an unused catalogue of words, and reeled it off methodically, as a Catholic tells his beads. He damned the lady navigators in sulphurous phrases.

But Carragh was beside those harassed maidens, advising them what they must do. The gong had been at work, the engines had moved, and the *Southern Cross* had nosed her way into a weatherly position and stopped.

The women stood in a group staring at what confronted them. Lady Barraclough, with her binoculars raised, walked up and down discovering new terrors. She said there were people waiting to be saved—they must save them. There were boats—they must be used. It was a thing one often read of in the morning papers. With what a thrill hereafter would they recognise this scene. But the boats! They must be manned; and, as a side-issue, who manned them, or should they call for volunteers? The notion was alluring, but out of it came Miss Guffles' de-

cision, "Each boat has its own crew, but who knows which is which, and would they obey us?" Obey us? Lady Barraclough's brow took a new line as she crossed over to consult Captain Ramsden. "We must do something, my dear, we must do something . . . or——"

"Yes, I know, and I can't do anything."

"Can't! My dear——"

But Violet Ramsden had decided the question, and was moving over to rejoin Carragh near the wheelhouse. She touched him on the arm, and said, "I can't do this. Will you take charge?"

"If you wish it."

"I do . . . it seems cowardly to ask you now, but it is ignorance. I don't know . . . I don't know."

She stood there, graceful, pleading, and looking up into his face with tired eyes and twitching mouth. Her voice rang so pitifully that he took her outstretched hand in his and pressed it.

"You are anxious," he said almost roughly; "leave it to me. How could you be expected to know?"

But whether he alluded to the soft palm resting so trustfully in his, or to the graver matter of control, did not appear. He moved away at once and cried out for the chief officer.

A voice answered from the lower deck, and Carragh proceeded to give orders. "Have the crews ready with lifeboats 1 and 3. Lower to the rail and wait! Quarter-master! Down to the engine-room and tell them to keep their fires in hand, we shall be stopped some time. Mr. Slade! Up here and get the search-light under way."

He crossed to the wing of the bridge and sent a shout over the palpitating waters. "Ship ahoy!" And again, "Wreck ahoy!"

A faint answer crept out of the void, and Carragh responded with, "Can you hold on till daylight if I stand by?"

And once more the reply came back, faint and far off, "She won't last! She's going."

"Half-speed astern! Slow!" Carragh shouted. "Ready with the boats there, Walton! Choose your own time! Take lamps, and no rushing. So!" to the man at the telegraph. "Stop her."

The ship thrilled to the propeller strokes, drew a little

farther off, and lay at rest, thumping the seas with her quarter. Then Carragh approached the fourth officer, standing ready with the search-light.

"Put it on," he ordered, "and sweep to leeward. So ! Steady there a while. . . . Lower away when you are ready, Walton—lower away !"

The squeal of blocks came up to where he stood leaning over the bridge rail, and a voice from the pit cried out, "Right-oh ! Unhook !"

A splash followed, then the noise of oars thrown into rowlocks, and across the white lane of sea two boats crept in jerks, spasmodically.

The navigators pressed forward, staring. It seemed a perilous enterprise, and, from their height, impossible. The light revealed undreamed-of troughs and peaks of wave ; it pointed the tips with foam and sunk the hollows into pitfalls, over the edge of which a boat must surely stumble or plunge head first ; yet they stole onward, wriggling side by side, and the oars splashed rhythmically, while Carragh, standing calm and silent on the bridge, manœuvred his ship to cover them.

A sea swept over the quarter, and rolled seething and spluttering into the lane. Carragh saw it. Walton, standing with his back to it and steering with a sweep, saw it too, and strove to keep his boat end on ; but she swerved as the crest leaped upon her, and when it had passed, only one boat wriggled forward in the lane.

Carragh scarcely moved his glasses ; he turned a little and shouted to an officer standing at the head of his crew. "Mr. Rathbone ! Lower No. 5 and take her away. At once !"

Lady Barraclough glanced up. "A man of iron," she remarked under her breath, and proceeded to dry her binoculars.

Out there in the white lane a number of black dots bobbed loosely, and from one of them came a shout, "No, go on . . . go on." The dots closed in as the third boat took the water. They seemed to be engaged in climbing the side of a spoon-shaped log—"A most stupid attempt," said a voice on the promenade ; and another, gruff and sarcastic, pointed the remark with, "Ya-as, so 'twould, if it didn't happen they want to turn 'er. Leave 'em alone."

Miss Guffles glanced about, expecting to see the pud-

ding-shaped man, but no one appeared. The critic was on the lower deck.

The first boat had rounded the stern of the wreck and disappeared by this time, and as No. 5 swept on in her wake the dots succeeded in turning theirs, and again the shout was reiterated, "No—go on . . . go on, we'll be there as soon as you."

They went on, insanely wriggling in the spume, till a sea swept up to envelope them; then the dots palpitated and the rain made a silver curtain across the lane.

It was magnificent! Some one on the promenade said so. The navigators could scarcely see; their eyes were blinded. Pretty Lucy Patterson, no longer bothered by inexplicable lights and complicated signals, leaned over the rail, wet and thrillingly alive to the hazards. "Are they safe? . . . are they safe?" she cried; "and can't something be done to help them?"

Miss Guffles grew huskily despondent, and Lady Barraclough prophesied catastrophe, until the gruff and sarcastic voice said plainly out of the murk, "Drown? How can they . . . w'y, they've got their wais-c'ts on—every mother's son."

"Waistcoats? Drivvel! and now they are alone . . . oh! this is terrible . . . terrible!"

But a movement on the wreck made it apparent that something was being done, at all events, there. The search-light had travelled slowly with the boats, and now lay quivering on the torn hull. It showed a great square stern, standing higher than the bow; some torn spars and a ballooning foresail, top-sail, and mizzen. A ship of the old school, living her last moments to the clank of a wind-mill pump, and the flap and roar of a main-sail blown from its gaskets. In these days of steam and steel and brittleness, a tramp is swallowed in minutes—five, ten, a dozen; but this churlish wave-puncher of the forties, with a stern like a barn and a bow like a pillow, still stood, after an hour's battle, to fight her enemy.

She choked with water; it gurgled in her throat. She lay gasping, yet that truculent old windmill ground up froth by the spoonful, and sniggered at the seas as though it could compass the safety of the torn hull on which it had stood so long.

A hurtling squall of wind and rain drove up from the

black sou'-west, and Toby Slade had much ado to keep his focus. The ship faded, grew dark, and, for a minute, passed out of ken. Yet down there in the spume and yeast men fought amidst leaping seas for lives, and the windmill clanked undaunted.

The squall rushed shrieking north, and again the wreck stood out ; white masts, white bellying sails, white rigging, struggling, puny figures. No cries came, no sound ; they were just marionettes ambling on a lighted stage—a stage that heaved and groaned and had no moment of peace. It was weird, unthinkable. Had any one gone ? And if so, who ? They could see the dots still bobbing beside that spoon-shaped log ; they perceived that it floated higher now, and the calm man standing with his glasses raised, staring into the chaldron, breathed more freely.

The last squall had sneezed. Things might have happened among those men and women ; but, apparently, they had not, and for so great a mercy, thanks to the God who sees.

Far away, at the extreme edge of that seething madness, a black blotch struggled with curious jumping effort. It was one of the boats returning, and Carragh signalled with his hand. " Watch that, Slade, try to cover her . . . Quartermaster ! Half-speed astern."

Again the engines moved, and the giant responded with quivering pulses. She drew back in line, took a small turn, and came forward on her track, nearer that struggling atom with the waving antennæ, sheltering it, nursing its approach, and smothering the rollers. The engines were stopped. The giant leaned over watching her child.

It drew near. Laboriously, with infinite puffing, it crept up and seemed within range ; but a sea lifted the giant and the child slipped back in a white splash that appeared to swallow it. But out of it came a cheery cry, " Stick to it ! Good lads ! . . . Give way, starboard ! " Then Peter Lovatt, with his boat half full of water, crept within reach of the line and " unrowed."

They hung off in the ghostly mist until a second electric light was brought into use ; then a basket was seen to descend upon them, and a minute later the women on the promenade were thrilled by the voice of a child. They gathered there on the murky decks, some crying, some

very still, some expectantly holding out their arms. They saw the basket trip upward, swinging perilously ; they saw it come down with a run, and a small drenched girl, wrapped in a sailor's jacket, revealing her nakedness to the winds. A cry that was half a sob made way at this, then some one swooped upon her, plucked her from the basket, and smothered her, while the voice of the lower deck philosopher said plainly, "That's the ticket . . . give 'em sothin' to kiss an' they'll be quiet as slugs."

No one noticed. No one had eyes for anything but the small bundle in a sailor's coat, and she was the quietest of them all.

A woman followed, then a girl, each of them palpitating to the davit head, and, with a swing, on deck. It was reckless . . . reckless ! Lady Barraclough asserted. They might break a limb, a dozen limbs, but no one heeded ; the boat had drawn nearer, and now a man's head, shaggy, yellow-curved, appeared climbing the rail ; a second followed, then Lovatt lay off on his oars to breathe his men, to give room, too, for No. 5, which, with Rathbone in charge, crept foaming up the lane. Then again they passed down to the wreck.

For three hours men fought and strove in the blinding downpour ; boat by boat, man by man ; for three hours it was impossible to say whether they would win in their race against time or lose ; for three hours lives were lived in the balance—yet no one gave the matter a thought. There were people drowning. Some one must save them.

The ship was waterlogged. Laden she would have gone long since, but being in ballast she remained like a tank, slowly guzzling the water, careening methodically by degrees, tilting by the head. To stand on her sloped decks in that hail of rain and spray was a feat in itself, but to work there, to pass down the women, and get the stolid Dutchmen transferred to those dancing cockleshells was a task which tried their strength to the uttermost. But Walton, no longer one of a series of dots, bobbing vaguely beside a spoon-shaped log, but vigorous, wet through, and burning to atone for his disaster, stood to see men do as he ordered.

He was the last to leave the wreck, and had to bring with him those who still remained. Rathbone, whose

boat had been damaged, now stayed on board the *Southern Cross*. Peter Lovatt, with his, was struggling up the lane. Walton faced the finish—and, honestly, the finish puzzled him.

Of the three still on board two were aloft lashed in the rigging; the other, a gaunt sea-warrior, with a beard like Father Neptune when he appears at the "line," remained gripping the lifelines by the wheel. He was the captain, and, like the majority of his crew, spoke the distorted English of the German sailor. "I no gan come," he announced through trumpeted hands in answer to Walton's appeal to look smart. "Would you gome andt leaf zose dwo tangling ones? Co on. . . I, too, gan sweem."

"Nonsense! You come and they'll follow—quick, I can't stop all day."

"No uze, Mistair Made . . . Co on."

Walton stood up in the stern sheets angry at the delay, and shouted orders at the pair. But their answer was a jumble of threats and prayers, unmeaning, horrible to recognise. They chattered one at the other, clinging, like a pair of monkeys, to separate spars. One sang dolefully. The other laughed. With every lurch, with every access of wind, with every flick of spray, they hugged the rigging, and gibbered over the chasm. It was pitiful.

At length Walton decided to climb on board, and they drew the boat alongside. Now, it is not an easy task to lower a man from a height into a boat that leaps about, the sport and plaything of every gust and wave that passes, but it is infinitely more difficult to climb unaided from a boat. Yet it was accomplished, and Walton, with one of his crew, reached the deck.

They came to the wheel and took the skipper in hand. They promised to save his men. He was numb from long exposure—they were warm and strong—would he trust them? After a time, with many protestations that he felt like a "gur" going first, they gained their point, and the skipper was bestowed in safety.

"Now," Walton shouted, standing cock-a-hoop at his dizzy altitude, "you manage the boat. Look after the floating stuff, and keep her off the side. Understand! I leave her in your charge, and you've got to obey orders."

The captain agreed. He took up the sweep and stood watching, his long beard wreathed about his neck like a muffler. "Ja—Goodt!" he said. "I look out."

The two men made their way across the deck and reached the rigging. To climb it at any time must have been a feat of some difficulty, so rotten were the ratlines; but to climb it now was like walking the rungs of a nearly horizontal ladder. There were pitfalls at every step. The ratlines were sagged and treacherous, the shrouds buckled, but they reached the top, came over it, and ascended the top-mast rigging, one behind the other.

In the crosstrees a pale-faced "Dutchman" sat laughing and waving his hands. "O—illy—illy! I lo! I lo!" A chant like a dirge, unending, weird as a Malayan hymn crooned to a one-string lute, fell upon the gale as they mounted, and then, with a swift transition, the voice broke into the slipshod vernacular of all Dutch sailors—"I no vant nuddings . . . go vay!" For answer they crept onward, and the man forgot their approach as he took up a verse of the "Watch by the Rhine." He sang it in a queer, cracked falsetto, which sounded curiously uncanny amidst the booming vigour of the gale.

Walton moved stealthily behind him.

"Silence!" he shouted. "Hands up."

The man obeyed with a pathetic smile, and remained rigid while the two bent over him, cutting his lashings and fastening a rope about his middle. When all was ready Walton spoke again. "Look here," he said, "we are going to take you home—to the bier-garten . . . Hamburg—savvy? Get up."

The man acknowledged the stern necessity with a simper—"Ja!" he said, "I vill go."

A minute later they had loosened his grip on the hornlik spars to which he clung, and he was swinging in mid-air over the chasm. Far down, looking like a small spoon in the turmoil, the boat bobbed and tugged at her holdfast, and as the man drew near, Walton could see the crew reach out to grip him and pull him in, as they would have reached out to grip and pull in a sack of potatoes lowered from a davit, and with as little fuss. The man swung like a spider at the end of its thread. He twisted swiftly this way and that, until a boat-hook reached him, and as he was

drawn in, a shout announced his safety. "One," said the chief; "now for the other."

- He glanced over to windward. The day was stealing slowly out there in the east, a sickly, yellow-green dawn was rising, but rising, too, was the inevitable sunrise squall—a blur of mist and rain towering nearly to the zenith heralded its approach. The *Southern Cross* lay in the middle-distance, proud, erect, and gleaming now despite the white rays of the search-light—gleaming at the return of the sun. And up there, suspended between her masts, over the bridge, something fluttered—a signal. But colours, even in a growing day, are unreadable unless the flags lie flat to the plane of the observer; and in twilight are useless, a sarcasm on our intelligence. There was a signal there, a signal of two flags, and that Walton knew meant anything urgent, anything imperative, from "Show your ensign," to "Go to the devil." He shook his head and turned away. "What is the use of bothering with conundrums?" he questioned.

Just beneath him was this other sailor who required coercion—a shock-headed ruffian, apparently a Dago, and in any case singularly still. Walton decided that as it was impossible to read the signal, he must do what he could in the way of coercion. The squall he barely noticed. He was accustomed to small vagaries of that kind, and had a mind to redeem his promise to the skipper—besides, it was all on the way home. "Home," at the moment, may be taken to represent boat.

He called out to his companion as he pulled up the rope—"Jump down there, quartermaster, and stand by to make that fellow fast. Look out for yourself, mind!"

The quartermaster made no ado, but immediately began the descent. He would as readily have commenced a climb to the truck quaking and trembling in the murk overhead, but as he came, the man, who was fast to the truss of the top-sail yard, woke up. "No come-a too much closer!" he shouted. "I no go down-a. Maldito! I speak—me. I no go down-a." The words rushed out; there was no mistaking the intonation; if the other had been mazed, then this one was mad. Yet the quartermaster continued his approach, saying in a quiet, restrained voice, "All right, chum. Keep yer hair on an' don't play the bloomin' goat—savvy?"

Then as he stepped out of the rigging to reach the yard, Walton cried out from his eerie, "Look out, the beast has a knife! Come back!"

The quartermaster climbed out of danger and looked up. "What are we going to do, sir?" he questioned. "Knock him on the head?"

"Lord knows—hullo! What's wrong now?"

They turned in answer to a blast on the yacht's whistle, and saw that the signal was moving rapidly up and down from the stay. The meaning was obvious; the people on board pointed to the fact that they desired to communicate. What did they wish to say? The pair strained their eyes, but they could make nothing of it. "Two square flags," the quartermaster announced, "but I don't see which, sir. Do you?"

"Devil the colour!"

"Perhaps it's measles, sir," said the quartermaster without a smile.

"Possibly—or the squall."

"Which is here, anyway, sir."

That, at all events, was very patent, for it broke upon them as though in answer to the suggestion, and their perch trembled with the renewed energy of the flapping sails.

"It's going to be thick, sir," said the quartermaster with a dull chuckle, as though he meditated laughter.

"Maybe!" The chief was still busy with the horizon, and the unread signal, and the difficulty of coercing a madman in the rigging of a sinking ship. Each problem baffled the other; and below, perhaps one hundred and thirty feet plumb from where they crouched, the sea lay with its face whipped white. Then into the straying notions came the quartermaster's haphazard plan.

"We'll have to leave him, sir."

"Can't, Jones!" The sentence had been sufficient to bring the thing to a head. "Can't Jones!" Then following the same train of thought, "Here, give me the line. You stand by to lower . . . and then—why, if he gives me any nonsense, I'll have to down him. Look out now!"

"Sir, it's foolishness. See that?"

"That" was a further reminder of the instability of their perch, and the quartermaster had grown suddenly serious at the sight of it. The mizen-mast groaned, and a

top-sail sheet, which had been content to whang steadily at the yardarm, now ripped clear and flapped with a force that set the spars dancing. The top-sail yard whipped up with every effort, and the old ship, lying so far beneath them, seemed to wallow in the surf. The boom irons and trailing cordage licked the face of it.

It was too late to move now, or to think of doing anything for that grinning soul hugging his knife beneath them. When the squall had passed, perhaps; but at present the wind was humming sweetly, sending out arms to rock their cradle, and about their ears the rain and hail flicked merrily. Walton stared into the chasm beneath.

"I haven't been so far from home for a month of Sundays," he said. "Jove—if this goes on, though . . ." He raised his voice suddenly and shouted at the spoon-like shape beneath, "Below there! Boat ahoy! Back astern . . . back—quick!"

He leaned forward, giving his orders in a new key, and the veiled dot lying sleepily in shelter began to move; the oars wriggled; the man with the sweep swayed back, alert at the danger shadowed in the order he had received.

Walton turned to his companion at this. "Look after yourself," he said. "Belt all right?"

The quartermaster passed his hand over the padded guernsey, and replied that he was glad for once he had it on, then stared into the pit, fascinated at the notion that had arrived to fluster him. "If," he said, "if——"

"Good," said the chief. "Heigho! we're none of us saints—yes if——"

"If?" the quartermaster reiterated plainly with the notion of explaining himself, but halting to throw a questioning glance into the eye of the squall; "if . . . why, sir, she's——"

The wind sprang out of the yellowing dawn with a yell, and a shower of spray that smothered them. It whistled over the grey-green waters, singing of doings farther afield; of the way it would stagger the racing "greyhounds," catching them by the throat and making them breathe with a gurgle; of the way it would receive that panting tramp hugging the Isle of Ushant; of how it would whistle in the ears of the watch, blind him to his danger, and play the siren to a modern Ulysses behind the bridge screen. It screamed, too, in the doublings of the mast,

and taking the sails of the tortured windmill at a venture, passed over and left the naked stumps to twist or die at will. It blotted out the waiting yacht, and catching the dull roar of her whistle, took it by the shoulder and led it away for its own. And with that gust the staunch old fighter bent low, swayed, lurched, and rolled over.

Amidst the spume, far from the hovering boat, two small figures battled gamely with the sea.

CHAPTER XIV

LADY BARRACLOUGH'S REPORT

"On board the *Southern Cross*,
"Falmouth, Wednesday, Aug. 15, 19—

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—What shall I say, and how shall I say it?

"You will doubtless have seen in the papers that we have arrived, and will, perhaps, and not unnaturally, have inferred that it has been a case of *veni, vidi, vici*; but if so, you are wrong. It is I who am conquered.

"I have written it, and I don't know that it will give me any pleasure to dilate on the processes through which I have arrived at this conclusion. They have been sufficiently annoying, even humiliating—still, I have promised you a faithful account, and I will do what I can to fulfil that promise.

"*Sturm und drang* best describes the atmosphere of the last few days; revolt my attitude towards it. We are marching backward. Man magnetises us. We are moving again towards our loadstone. Like the needle, we only waver for a while, then hasten to fasten ourselves on the magnet. Women are changing. Indeed, in the last few years they have gone back. We no longer are anxious to prove our capabilities; we no longer desire to point to the fact that we can excel even in pursuits from which we have been jealously barred for centuries; we have no real ambition to attain.

"To go farther, I may add, that it appears to me that we are content to play golf and take degrees, or to play tennis, cricket, skittles, or become county councillors, not for the healthiness and the benefit to our long-tortured minds and bodies, but because these things bring us into

contact with man ; that we are delighted to talk slang, to put our feet up, wear tight dresses, and smoke cigarettes, not because we prefer those modes of enjoyment ourselves, for I cannot bring myself to believe that any woman honestly likes smoke or vulgarity for itself, but because we believe they are appreciated by man. But are they—are they ? And in any case, the folly of it—for men !

“Man in the abstract is doubtless a wonderful animal ; indeed, I am inclined to think the evolutionists err on the side of kindness, and do not credit him with a sufficiency of that native slime from which they say he emerged ; they leave him too clean—but individually man is anathema. He is a weathercock. A peacock, inordinately proud. He struts—struts. Any face, provided it is pretty and simpering, and is backed by an income, suffices as a lure. Brain-power, mind—where are these ? They are not considered. At all events they are ineffectual.

“But all this is beside the point, and you will be justified in condemning my prolixity. I cry *peccavi* and will have done with it. It has been dragged from me by my trial. My brother alone can appreciate the bitterness that is upon me.

“We came down Channel and were caught in a gale. That, I believe, is the orthodox way of speaking of this thing ; but it conveys nothing, and I am at a loss for words to describe it. It rained—rained. No adjective will touch the similitude of that downpour ; but when it had finished raining, it blew, and the ship behaved as the people behave—on a bank holiday.

“It was a marvellous sight ; and for those who had what they vulgarly call sea-legs it was instructive. Towards two o'clock on Saturday last, Guffles and Lucy Patterson, who were on watch, discovered a wreck—the wreck of some old sailing ship that had been in collision, but still floated. This was an excellent opportunity for our navigators to call in the help of mankind—and they called it in, and fell on its neck and wept !

“Captain Carragh, who, by the way, is not a bad fellow at any time, behaved in the coolest manner in the most trying circumstances—I refer to the ordeal of storm, not to the ordeal of tears—and if any one is to be heroised or lionised, he should be that man ; but because, forsooth, *one of the officers*, the chief, I believe, happens to have

attained the dignity of a broken arm and some scratches, he and the younger officers are now the pride and comfort of our nursery. Yes ; actually—nursery. So far have we fallen.

"We are in Falmouth. There are hospitals galore; there are doubtless sorrowing and lonely wives somewhere in the background ; but our women will have none of it. They insist on nursing these heroes themselves, and with Violet to aid them, have turned one of the state-rooms into a hospital. And this for a person who plays the banjo and sings what I am told are—Limericks.

"Two others who were saved from the wreck are also in that hospital, and I have no doubt that when we return, if we are not already apportioned, we shall take up hospital work in earnest, and marry any of the doctors who may happen to be bachelors at those institutions. For are we not fully endowed?—do we not possess incomes? Well—and when you think of it, is it not *the* thing for women to do in these days of decreasing population? Has not the decree been spoken?

"You will see from all this that I have utterly changed my views ; that I agree with you as to the inexpediency of placing women in the position we hold here. It was unwise. But you will admit I did it honestly. I believed. Now ! But why talk of it? Matters have gone so far to-day, our third since we entered, that I decided to bring them to a head ; and with dear, patient, little Vereker-Tayler and Guffles to aid me, sought an interview with Violet and her friends in the drawing-room.

"I suggested that as it was very evident we had no very deep sense of the seriousness of the task we had set ourselves, and as it was apparent that some of us were more concerned with man, *per se*, than with ordering our lives as though man were not, we had better reconsider the matter and take the ship home.

"Of course that raised a storm. I intended that it should, as you will guess. Violet took up the cudgels on behalf of her friends with quite unnecessary heat, and announced that she had no intention of returning, at least until the six months was up ; and that if I chose to be horrid and wanted to throw away money and chances, &c., &c.—oh ! you can guess the rest, so I will spare you the details, for the end is transparent. It is always transparent.

with us. As somebody says, we are not what we seem, but that which circumstance has made us. I anathematise circumstance. It has ordained, among other stupidities, that women, when they have a difference, shall invariably end in tears. We ended in tears, protestations, jewels of metaphor ! And so, my brother, you behold me still more rigidly bound ; still more fettered ; still more tied, abjectly tied to this neck-yoke of mine which caused me so much joy in the fashioning.

"But the *dénoûement* . . . the *dénoûement* ! Oh ! it throbs—it throbs ! It appals me !

"Your affectionate sister,

"HONORIA."

CHAPTER XV

FALMOUTH

A CALM, hot night with the stars mirrored in the sleeping waters of the tongue-like bay, the ship's lights gleaming beside them : the decks silent, the crew resting pipe in mouth.

From the forecastle came the murmur of voices telling wonderful yarns in a soft, monotonous drone ; from just beside the skylight on the lower deck, the ripple of a girl's laugh, very low and hushed ; from the smoking-room, the lilt of a song and the banjo. The girl did not laugh at the banjo, or the song—she sat in the shade of the awning with a man's arm about her waist. He was the bo'sun ; she was Hargreaves—Lady Barraclough's Nuisance.

Two figures came down the promenade—the one, a dainty personage clad in silk and fluffed with chiffon ; the other, a tall, clean-shaven man in the evening dress of a naval officer of the two R brand.¹ Sadie Cole and Captain Carragh, in other words, enjoying the still beauty of a night asleep under the blazing stars.

They came to the smoking-room window and paused.

"More 'Limericks'?" the girl questioned with lifted finger.

"No—drama. Listen . . ." and the voice proceeded—

"The good St. Antony kept his eyes
Firmly fixed upon his book,
And tears nor laughter, cries nor sighs
Could not win away a look."

"tum tiddle-le I-ti . . . tum tiddle-le I-ti . . ." the banjo thrummed.

¹ Naval Reserve. R.N.R.

"St. Antony?" Sadie Cole interjected. "Anything to do with the light you were telling me of?"

"Nothing. *Apropos*, though."

The chorus welled out—

"There were laughing devils, jeering devils,
Devils great and devils small,
But a big black cat with staring eyes
Was the greatest devil of all."

"And who is St. Antony?" Sadie Cole questioned again.

"Some Egyptian Johnny, I believe, who sat on a pole and refused to look at women," Carragh answered lightly.

"Silly old man," said Mrs. Cole.

"Perhaps he was wise, Mrs. Cole, who knows?"

"Captain Carragh," said that lady, "let us understand each other. My name to people I know just a wee bit, is Mrs. Sadie Cole; to those I know well, it's Jo; but to those I intend to keep at arm's length, it's Mrs. Cole."

Carragh smiled. It was very little to him how he addressed her, his thoughts were centred on a fairer, taller, more reserved personage; yet when he looked down and caught a glimpse of that piquant face, white beneath a great black hat with sweeping plumes, and noticed the daring attitude, and, perhaps, no less daring dress, he took the suggestion at a venture.

"And if one may inquire," he said, "where do I come in?"

The keen black eyes gleamed merrily, despite the smallness of the minnow. "You?" came from the arched lips with an air of immense astonishment; then smiling at the quick flush apparent on his face, "Oh, I guess you may come in where you like."

"And tears nor laughter, sighs nor cries," thrummed the banjo, "could not win away a look."

Sadie Cole glanced at her companion. "How stupid some men are," she expostulated. But Carragh had no reply. He was alive to the fact that he had leaped too suddenly, that some one else laughed—some one with a big picture hat and waving black plumes; and the chorus *accentuated* it, beating it out on the banjo—

"There were laughing devils, jeering devils,
Devils great and devils small,
But a big black hat with waving plumes
Was the greatest devil of all."

"Why devils?" Sadie Cole asked again. "And why cat?"

"Cat . . . cat? Oh—the old-world way of speaking of the sex, nothing more."

"The old way?" she questioned with raised brows.

"Precisely, for in these days who would dare?"

"Too thin, captain . . . too thin!" she flashed. "Come away. Toby Slade is getting monotonous."

They passed to the rail at the end of the promenade, and leaning against it, stared into the shimmering distance. But Mrs. Cole was not enamoured of silence, nor, appreciably, of the beauties of Nature, unless for Nature one reads, mankind—and in that case . . . well, at all events, she abhorred silence.

"Watching the lights again?" she asked half petulantly.

"My! you are slow! And I thought you wanted to know where you might come in."

"I did—but——"

"Captain Carragh!"

"Pardon," he laughed. "The fact is, Slade's nonsense put it out of my head and——"

"Worse and worse. How dare you? Well, and now that it has returned," she smiled, "now that it has returned, Captain Carragh?"

Carragh hesitated, then took the leap as even a sheep will leap if it is badgered sufficiently. "I think," he said, "that perhaps I had better come in on the ground floor."

There was no question as to the honesty of Sadie Cole's laughter this time; it rang like a peal of silver bells, and should have been very fascinating. "Why!" she cried at length, "that sounds as though you took me for a skyscraper. The ground floor—how very British! Say, how long will it take you to climb?"

"That depends on what the stairs will stand," Carragh flashed.

Mrs. Cole stepped back and examined him with grave deliberation. "Come," she said, "that's better. N-o-o, you're not British. That's too smart for British. You are Irish. I might have recollected.

"I like the Irish," she rattled on before Carragh could intervene, "they're keen. They can see things. They aren't dense—but the British ; well, just look at Honoria !"

"Honoria ?"

"Lady Barraclough."

"Yes—well, she is rather a tartar."

"Tartar ! I like that. Why, she's the whole British nation rolled in one personality—Grundy-ism, Anti-ism, Idiot-ism. She can't see straight because it doesn't fit in with her dignity to twist her neck ; she can't judge straight because she holds there's only one opinion worth consideration—that's hers. Result, there is nothing good—not even women, and there's nothing just bad—it's all dee'd bad ; there's nothing rotten—it's all dee'd rotten . . . hope you don't curl at the adjective. It's essential."

"Oh, but do you think——" Carragh commenced, stepping impetuously into the scathing sentences, but Sadie Cole refused to hear.

"I do think," she announced ; "and if Lady Barraclough, and for that matter, Vereker-Tayler and a whole lot of silly anti-'s, would only think too, they would arrange to take life as they find it, and not as they make it out to be.

"You must remember," Mrs. Cole went on with a crispness that took Carragh's breath away, "that these people say, to begin with, that marriage is a failure. Now that is a debatable question, and cannot be dealt with in a single sentence. Again, they say men are idiots—and there they come down to my level and I begin to agree : but they forget that, if men are idiots, it's the women who have made them idiots. Then they go and clinch the whole pronouncement by saying that women are fools to marry them, and, finally, that the world would be a better place if folks didn't marry at all—and there I part company altogether.

"Now Lady Barraclough and her friends are not free-thinkers, nor immoral—they're just illogical. They forget in their heat against wrong with a capital W, that if marriage were stopped we'd either have to suffer depopulation or legitimise the gutter. There are no half-measures in this business—yet they can't see it, and Lady Barraclough can't see it. Won't see it is the proper *phrase*, and that is just where her prejudices trip in and

romp away with her. Oh, she's British to the backbone . . . British, British, British ! ”

Carragh stood in absolute dismay. He had no knowledge of these questions, and an inborn dislike to discussing them. He preferred, if he thought at all on the subject, to shrug his shoulders ; to admit, if it sounds better, that stumbling-blocks exist ; that it was all very appalling, very terrible—but there it ended. And now he stood face to face with a young and brilliant woman, a girl, his sight told him, who made no stumbling-block of difficult words or debatable subjects, but just looked him in the eyes and gave her opinion with a *verve* that made him wince. Incongruous ! He smiled as the thought struck him, and answered lightly—

“ You are treading on my corns, Mrs. Cole, as well as on Lady Barraclough's.”

Her manner changed in a moment. “ Yours ! ” she laughed. “ But you are not British. I'll not believe it.”

“ Afraid I am.”

“ Naturalised ? ”

“ No ; born there. London. Generations of us.”

“ Generations—my ! ”

Again Carragh smiled. He rather plumed himself on the manner in which he had escaped, and welcomed the more frivolous intonation. “ But of course,” he said, “ originally we were Irish. I need scarcely tell you that.”

“ No,” said Sadie Cole with immense deliberation, “ and I need not look twice at those grey-blue eyes of yours to know it. You're as Irish as the pigs o' Drogheda.”

Carragh had nothing to say ; but the girl turned and watched him coolly ; noticed the flush, the hesitation, yet maintained an even manner, smiling, very certain of her own strength if not of his.

“ You see,” she went on with the air of one who knew the last thing of humanity, “ you see I have made rather a study of men—and, to be honest, I like you. I think you're a good sort, and I don't see why Lady Barraclough, or Mrs. Grundy, or any other disagreeable person, should prevent my saying so, simply because I happen to be a woman. I don't believe in convention, do you ? ”

At the moment Carragh was uncertain what he believed in ; whether to bless convention or to curse it. The thing was so wrapped about with suggestions, for and against,

It depended mainly on whether he would often be compelled to run the gauntlet of a cross-examination in the ethics of morality—so he told himself. And yet he was uncertain how to answer, whether to be amused or annoyed. He recognised that on the whole the former would be the least trouble ; and then, too, the girl was beautiful, and a beautiful woman has latitude, as we all admit, where her less fortunate sister has none. He decided to take the matter from the lazy man's point of view.

"The main thing is to please yourself, Mrs. Cole," he said.

"That's what I do, captain. By the way, though, we haven't climbed far yet, have we ?"

"I am British," he protested, "have pity——"

"You might have been Scotch," she conceded, eyeing him sideways.

"And in that case ?" he hazarded.

"Oh, in that case you'd never climb, except for bawbees."

"Cynical!" he laughed, "and already."

"Not a bit. I married a Scotchman, so I know it's true."

"Oh—er——"

"Don't apologise. He died some time back, and I'm not weeping."

Carragh felt dizzy. He had nothing to say. Mankind is not good at a situation of this sort ; as a rule he does not shine. Carragh didn't shine ; he fingered his lips like a boy on the edge of a proposal. The girl, on the other hand, was brilliant, self-possessed, and amazingly at her ease. She did not ask for sympathy ; her voice rang hard, her eyes had taken a steely glint ; Carragh, halting, distraught and full to the hilt of commonplace, could scarcely offer it. In a moment, however, she had relieved the tension by falling back on her lighter mood. She raced along—

"Say, don't you make any of the orthodox speeches or hand around any medical comforts, or I shall think you want to get quit of me. I believe it's best to let you know how I stand—first, because I like you ; and second, because you're Irish, and I want you to see which line to toe—right off !"

Carragh raised his cap for some unknown folly—he

never knew what, for by the time he had reached the preparatory, "Mrs. Cole," that lady had interrupted him.

"One minute," she cried, lifting her hand with a pleading gesture, "let me finish. That's right. Now—

"I remember once having read the history of one of your great beauties—an Englishwoman who had three husbands. The first she married for love, the second for position, the third for money. And that," said Sadie Cole, with distinct enunciation, "was taking big risks with youth. I don't intend to chance that; so you may reverse the order and it's mine. I am beautiful—of course I am not fool enough to pretend I don't know that—I am rich, and my first husband is dead. Therefore my next step must be for position. I shall probably marry an earl. An old one for preference."

"Perhaps," said Carragh, with an insane desire to laugh, "perhaps if there are to be three, it will be as well to choose them old. A bit wheezy, now, might add to the speed. What do you think?"

"Leave that to me," she decided with a merry nod. "No, I have no qualms on the subject. I had once, but they are dead too. They died with the stress of my first marriage. My husband was a Scotchman, you remember, and he was busy with his bawbees. They took a lot of getting, and when he'd got them he was sixty-four and I was eighteen. So we married." She said this with the first serious touch of the conversation, and Carragh began to dread he knew not what; but he need not have feared. Sadie Cole was one of the new type who don't give away their feelings, unless they wish to do so. She picked up her voice and rattled along, "Wicked, wasn't it? Rather! Well, I had no say in that; but as he's dead and I am a rich widow, I have come to the conclusion that there are compensations even for a chit of a girl who made a brilliant hash of her first matrimonial venture—provided she got tied up to the bawbees as well as the husband; and so, I'm going for them—see?"

"Captain Carragh, I'm free! I thank my husband. You observe I have no illusions; I thank my husband. I have lots of money—for that, too, I thank my husband; and as a result, I intend—well, we need not go into that; but, as a preliminary, I may tell you that I'm going to amuse myself—myself, mind, and try to get back a little

of what I lost in those three years of marriage ; now you have my age. Give me a cigarette, there's a dear kind man ! ”

Carragh opened his case and struck a match, holding it so that she could obtain a light. She accepted it, and, leaning forward, puffed away serenely unconscious of the pretty picture she made ; or was it serenely conscious of the pretty picture she undoubtedly made beneath the electric lamp ? At all events she was unconscious of the fact which had already dawned on Carragh, that Lady Barraclough, with raised starers and Violet Ramsden at her side, had entered the arena she so fully occupied.

“ I'm a connoisseur in these things,” she smiled, “ and this is a ripper. Say, captain, how I envy you. How I wish I were a man.”

For the life of him, Carragh could think of nothing saner to say than “ Do you ? Why ? ”

“ Why ? So that I could make love to pretty women—dozens at a time—scores ! ”

“ I don't think you would,” Carragh returned. “ You would find one sufficient.”

She glanced up with a roguish twinkle and said, “ Think so ? Nonsense ! A man is good for a dozen all the time.”

Carragh remained dumb, for Lady Barraclough and her friend were rustling out of the shadows, and a moment later they paused beside them. It was impossible to believe that either had missed the sentence or the action that accompanied it ; a glance into the face of either was sufficient evidence of that ; yet Lady Barraclough's voice had no tremor when she spoke ; it was simply, ideally, rasping.

“ My dear,” she said, “ we have been looking for you everywhere. Do you know that it is past ten o'clock ? ”

“ Guess I do, Lady Barraclough, but I'm not staggered,” Mrs. Cole announced with a gaiety that was evidence of her chagrin.

“ But . . . but——”

“ But me no buts, madam. Ten o'clock ! Why, the night is young, and I love the night as the stars love darkness. Let me shine while I may.”

“ You shine always,” Carragh put in with a swift desire to champion one so crudely attacked.

"I see," said Lady Barracclough with a grim intonation, "that Captain Carragh has not forgotten his visit to Blarney."

"If courtesy is to be obtained by a simple visit," Carragh commenced ; but Sadie Cole rushed into the gap and saved him. She lifted her ruffle with a quick gesture, and shook it about her soft white throat. "Between you," she said, "I require a veil."

"A cloak, you mean," came in Lady Barracclough's hard voice as she noted the gleaming neck and shoulders. "My dear, I advise one, if you wish to escape a chill."

Mrs. Cole accepted the addenda with a lazy movement, then turning to Carragh, said in a voice very nearly allied to laughter, "Perhaps she's right. Do you mind ? I left it on the lounge—away back."

He moved off at once, and the three ladies drew together.

"Well ?" said Mrs. Cole.

"Wicked !" Lady Barracclough returned.

"Matter of opinion, my dear."

"You'll turn his head."

"I'm not afraid of his head."

"You were making love to him . . . it's monstrous."

"Think so ?" Mrs. Cole questioned with raised lids.

"I suggest it as a possibility . . . it is my duty."

"Duty takes an ugly guise sometimes—by the way, you don't want him yourself, I suppose ?"

Lady Barracclough gasped, but she gave no other sign, although it was very easy to see the anger that oppressed her. Violet Ramsden came to her relief with a quick cry.

"Oh ! don't ! don't !" she begged. "Why must you two argue and bicker, and make things so unpleasant——"

"Argue ! . . . bicker ! . . . my dear Violet !"

* "Oh ! your dear Violet will have nothing further to say. I object to scenes ; they are horrid. I am going to bed."

She turned swiftly up the promenade, but before she had taken a dozen steps Sadie Cole was beside her, and her arm was about her waist.

"Violet . . . Violet !" she panted. "You are not cross with me, are you ? You don't believe her, do you ?"

"I don't know what to believe," came from the tightened lips.

Sadie Cole relaxed her grip.

"Then you believe it?" she said.

No answer.

"And you are in love with him yourself—is that it, dear?"

Violet Ramsden looked up swiftly enough at this and said, "Him? . . . who do you mean?"

"Why, Captain Carragh, of course."

"I don't . . . you are horrid! You know I don't."

Sadie Cole stepped before her friend and caught her hands, half checking her pace. "Then why are you crying?" she demanded.

"I am not crying."

Sadie made no further attempt at consolation. She turned and moved towards the forward end of the promenade, expecting to find Lady Barraclough there; but the place was empty, and in the distance she saw Carragh coming to meet her with the cloak. She advanced puffing at her cigarette.

"Phew!" she whistled, "I'm in a fever."

"Let me help you with your wrap," said Carragh; then glancing around, "where are the others?"

"Gone. Been ructions. Think they mean to chuck the whole thing and go home."

"Nonsense!"

"You'd be glad, wouldn't you?"

"No—why should I?"

"Thought you kicked at the notion of being bossed by a lot of petticoats—that's all."

"Well—at first it seemed——"

"Like knuckling down, eh? But now you don't mind."

"I'm becoming acclimatised," Carragh laughed. "Why not?"

"True—there *are* a lot of pretty women about."

"I see one," Carragh admitted.

"At the moment," Sadie corrected.

"Precisely. Just now, for instance, there were two."

"Very well, and this one has a word to say to you. No! I mean it—there has been a shindy. I'm not going to tell you what about; but I want to know whether I can trust you——"

"Of course you may. You know I am honoured by the——"

"Oh! Don't be pedantic and complimentary. Fancy I'm a man."

"Right."

"That's better. Now I want to be your friend."

"I am yours."

"And you won't get out of hand?"

"Try me."

"Nor make love to me?" she threw off with an audacious smile.

"Never."

"I think you are level. Yes—I will believe you."

"Thanks."

"But I am pretty, you know, and you *might* get tempted."

"Then cut me out of your will."

"Delightful. The very thing. We are friends—but remember, you are Captain Carragh, and I am Mrs. Sadie Cole. We are going to finish this trip they talk of stopping, and we are going to have a high old time and precious few isms. That so?"

"It's a compact," said Carragh, "and there's my hand on it."

"A compact," said Sadie Cole, "requires a more emphatic registration. I propose we seal it in the orthodox manner." . . . She lifted her face to his, and he took her at her word. "Once, mind—no lips," and he kissed her forehead.

"There," she remarked, with the air of one climbing back to commonplace, "now we are bound to act straight, and we shall marry and live happily ever after—no, not each other, but that other half of each of us that is wandering around waiting in the realms of space for its affinity—the earl, for instance, and . . . by the way, though, you aren't married, I suppose?"

"No."

"That's all right . . . and of course you love her?"

"Her?" Carragh questioned, a trifle embarrassed at the intonation.

"Well, I don't suppose it is him; and it certainly couldn't be it, so what is there left?"

"Obviously her," said Carragh.

"Of course it is her," she flashed. "A man who could love a him, or an it, when her is present, would be as big a fool as Lady Barraclough—and that is going a long distance towards strait-jackets. Right. You leave it to me. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mrs. Cole."

Sadie paused beneath the lamp and threw a glance over her shoulder.

"My!" she said, "but you *are* Scotch!"

Then, in a moment, Carragh stood alone, staring at the vanishing silken sheen, wondering, half incredulous.

CHAPTER XVI

INTER ALIA—HARRISON

AT what hour, or by what means, Mrs. Sadie Cole contrived to effect the beginning of a reconciliation with Lady Barraclough, never transpired ; at least, it did not transpire in all the completeness of detail that might have been expected in a region so rich in opportunity for espionage as a ship's cabin. That there were hints, suggestions, even elaborate theories, goes without saying ; and of them, perhaps that given by Hargreaves in her character as Nuisance, was the fittest for credence among the lower deck philosophers. But as the statement came through a roundabout circuit, highly charged at the end by a Chinaman's cluckings, it is easy to see there was nothing very translatable, nothing quite positive, except the fact that after breakfast on the following day Lady Barraclough and Sadie Cole were walking the deck together and talking quite amicably.

Hargreaves' announcement, given in Wo-sun's idiom, was to the effect that, when "two clock gone lillie while . . . daak, befor bleaksup, La'y Ballaclup sit in cabin, fan herself, pull out teese an' cly, cly, cly. Silly Ha'gleaves say she cly buccupfull, call out, makee hulla-ba-loo . . . loud, like ole hen. Cluck, cluck, cluck ! No, can do nussing more, only cly. Then, bye'n-bye come along plitty la'y . . . tall," Sammy emphasised height, lifting his hands ; "lound," Sammy indicated a "decent figure" by sweeping movements executed with both hands ; "big hat . . . black, tall—velly nicee hat ; velly nicee la'y—all big, lound eye, black—allee samee mine. Yum, yum !" said Sammy, grinning till his own showed like thin black

slits—"Oh! velly nicee—an' large; allee samee Missy Capin Lamsen—only more lound—see?"

"See?" questioned the audience, which consisted of the quartermaster with the conscientious scruples and the bo'sun, Jenks. "Go on, ye little heathen, an' not so much paint."

"Paint?" said Sammy. "What that?"

"Adjectives," said the quartermaster with the scruples, "balderdash . . . cut yer cackle an' come to the hosses."

"Cackle?" Sammy questioned again. "What that?"

"What you're given to, you little yella-angel. Go on. What did she *do*?"

"Puttee alms lound neck—cly . . . hug . . . kissee," said Sammy, straining his neck to give emphasis to the words.

"Rather she than me," was the lower deck dictum, given from behind a black short pipe, "eh, mate?"

"Makes me sick to think of it," said he of the qualms. "Fancy kissin' 'er!"

The bo'sun fancied, ruminating behind a cloud of smoke. "I s'pose they do, though," he remarked, "even at 'er hage. Lumme! it's a kenundrun."

But what was the conundrum or who he pitied did not appear. The main point in view was the one all men could see for themselves if they chose to strain their necks—Lady Barraclough and Sadie Cole walking the promenade and talking quite affably on the theories of John Stuart Mill.

It is not every day that John Stuart Mill heals a breach; more often he goes to the making of them—but here undoubtedly was a case of lip-salve. American lip-salve, not too honeyed; not too searching; not too thickly administered—but just a *soupçon* at which no skin would tighten or crack. And administered by the hand of a pretty woman—an artist . . . well, the thing stands out. What might never have been accomplished was now done—and to John Stuart Mill the *onus*, the praise, the, "whatever eventuates," of our cousins, be all honour and thanksgiving.

But what the dead-and-gone philosopher had begun so well, Harrison, the brusque north-countryman completed. It happened, as they say in the fairy books, in this wise.

Carragh, with Walton and Toby Slade, was gone on a

picnic jaunt to Porthcuel River, and with them, by some amazing destiny, were Violet Ramsden, Lady Jane, Lucy Patterson, and some other ladies and their respective Nuisances.

Carragh, Walton, and Slade being thus out of court, it fell to Peter Lovatt and Billy Rathbone, two of the heroes, to meet Captain Harrison when he arrived spluttering at the head of the gangway. Captain Harrison had not advertised his coming. Like many other persons in authority, he believed in surprises, and had no hesitation in visiting the surprised with the richly-embroidered bag¹ if by chance he caught them napping. Sometimes, of course, it was not nap, but poker—but that is another story, and here we are concerned with the fact that Harrison mounted the gangway and came upon the two officers *in corpore sano*, and a quartermaster at the salute, very rigid and precise, so Harrison was pleased.

A bright, sunshiny day; fresh, clean clouds; fresh, clean air, and a yacht officered by ladies and shining like the proverbial dollar, were sufficient inducements even for a man of Harrison's choleric temper, to view things placidly and with benignly-folded hands. The marine superintendent perceived all these things. He acknowledged the quartermaster's salute, a certain sign that his breakfast had agreed with him; he saluted the officers, and then extended his hand! Great Scot! He also beamed through those gold-rimmed glasses of his and looked pleased to see them. The officers shook hands with him, and, behind his back, with each other. It was a revelation; a study in amiability and good-fellowship positively luminous of promotion.

"Hah, Lovatt!" he exclaimed, "fine day . . . brisk day. And how are you enjoying the new government?"

Lovatt shrank, metaphorically, into a personage of no beginnings, no destiny, no aim; but he recognised that Captain Harrison was not displeased and said, aloud, that he was learning to admire even Lady Barraclough, and to himself, that he wished to goodness Harrison wouldn't be so confoundedly emotional. The marine superintendent, nothing abashed, resumed—

"You, too, Rathbone . . . let me see, you are Billy

¹ Dismissal—known as "the sack."

Rathbone, though, aren't you? Distinguishes you from that other Rathbone on the *Juggernaut*. That man's a thorn in my side since he took a wife—a thorn! Well, and so you have allowed the women to take the rise out of you, and, thrown away the chance of earning your country's appreciation. Man! but ye're wise in your generation—wise. If you would win fame and geegaws, remember to advertise the greatness, the dexterity and *savoir faire* of your superior officers. Never blatant your own share in heroics; never wag an egotistical tongue, but give it all over to authority, cap in hand; for then, if ye have luck, Authority will shape your destinies and lift you, in order that you may continue to shout his praise. It's a law—a law . . . er—where is Captain Carragh?"

Harrison suddenly awoke to the fact that he was expanding within earshot of a quartermaster with a face like an owl, and his lips became rigid.

"Gone for a run up the Porthcuel River, sir," Lovatt replied.

"Good . . . hum!—er—chief?"

"Gone too."

"Hum! . . . er—broken arm, too—hum! . . . Lady B?"

"No, sir. She's on the promenade walking with Sadie Cole . . . that is——" Lovatt rambled into incoherency and paused. Harrison moved some paces farther aft, then turned half round, his sharp eyes twinkling.

"Sadie Cole, eh?" he ejaculated. "Is she, by any chance, one of the dragons?"

Lovatt saw his error, but before he could reply Rathbone cut in with—

"No, sir. Young and pretty as they make 'em. A good sort, too! Keeps the peace like one o'clock."

"Hah! . . . hum! . . . but Sadie Cole!" He turned to Lovatt. "Man!" he cried, "look after that promotion of yours. Watch your opportunities and forget all about Sadie Coles . . . Married officers are a drug. You take me? Rathbone of the *Juggernaut* is married. He'd better have lain in the track of the car . . . d'you take me?"

They both took him, and said so with many asseverations, walking meanwhile up and down the deck and praying that Captain Harrison would not register the slip on the debit, side of that terrible ledger of his. For against it

they knew no officer could hope to pass into the realms of command and all night at the beck of a quartermaster waiting to haul him piecemeal to the bridge.

But Harrison had forgotten the ledger, and his eyes twinkled.

"Well," he went on, "there is no gainsaying the fact that matters are just going as I wish them, as far as the afterguard is concerned; but what about the hands? . . . any more *sans-culotte* episodes—eh, what?"

Lovatt admitted that people had remained decently clothed, even the firemen, but went on to say that some of the sailors had developed a conscience.

Harrison came to an abrupt pause, standing straddle-legged in the alley-way. "A conscience, eh! Lady B.'s teaching. I knew it. . . . Well, what form does it take?"

"A conscientious objection on the part of a quartermaster to calling female skippers, sir."

"No—you don't say!"

"I do, sir," Lovatt emphasised, laughing broadly at the puckered face staring into his. "Says he's married, and one woman is enough for any man to call."

Harrison chuckled, grew red to his hat, and broke into a loud guffaw. The deck echoed with it, the beams carried it in gusts. It crept up to where Lady Barracrough marched on the upper deck thumbing a turned-down page of John Stuart Mill, and brought her to a halt. The quartermaster on the gangway turned round and examined very minutely a speck in the ocean beneath him, but his shoulders gave him away—they shook. Harrison leaned against the rail. "Haw—haw—haw—haw!" he said. "Ha—ha—ha—ha! Good Lord, man, but ye don't mean it . . . piff—piff—piff—piff! Ho—ho—ho—ho! Hit me, some one . . . pat my back . . . O ye gods and little apples! What did ye say? Man, are ye laughing at me—or——"

No—neither Lovatt nor Rathbone was laughing at the great little man, but they were laughing with him—chuckle for chuckle; red as he was, double as he was, stamping to and fro as he was. They held their sides, and for some minutes was that extraordinary spectacle visible to a peeping crew, of the great marine superintendent dancing about the alley-way, hatless, purple, and the two officers in a like predicament.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" cried one.

"Ho, ho, ho, ho!" said another.

"Cackle, cackle, cackle, cackle!" went all three.

It was immense. Even Lady Barraclough found it contagious, and came to the side with a broad smile on her face, and said to Sadie Cole, "Somebody seems amused."

And her friend's comment came down, "Seems to me more like hysterics."

The laughter worked its own cure, however. It died of exhaustion. Then Harrison, erect, very stiff about the mouth and limp about the collar, made his way to the commander's room, and for half an hour remained wiping his eyes.

At the end of that time the captain's bell sounded in the pantry, and Wo-sun passed fearfully up the stairs to attend the great man's wants.

"Captain Carragh come back, boy?"

"No, seh."

"Coming back to lunch?"

"Tink not, seh . . . tink he takee lunch in boatee. I makee look see."

"No—that will do . . . er . . . any one on deck, Sammy?"

Sammy acknowledged the familiarity with that expressionless wrinkling of the eyes which belongs to the Chinese by grace of merit.

"Lä'y Ballaclup on deck, seh," he announced with his clucking gesture; "uzzer lä'y with her—tall, lound, big hat . . . seh."

"Mrs. Sadie Cole, I presume; eh?"

Sammy clucked the affirmative.

"Hah, then I will go out and see them," said Harrison.

He left the room at once, and proceeding along the promenade, came to the two ladies and lifted his hat.

"I have to congratulate you, Lady Barraclough," he said, "and you too, Mrs. Cole, on the seaman-like manner in which you rescued those poor chaps the other night. It was a feat of which even men might be proud." Again Harrison bowed deep. It did not suit his style. He was too round to take kindly to the flourishes of Louis Quinze.

Lady Barraclough at once intervened with a protest. "I regret," she said, "that I am unable to accept your

congratulations. In point of fact, if it had not been for Captain Carragh and his officers I fear the poor souls would have been lost. No—you must not thank us.”

“But, if you will pardon me,” Harrison broke in, “I have read the account. Uncommon good stuff it makes too—circumstantial, effective.”

“The account?” Lady Barracough questioned, abruptly stopping him.

“*Times*—August the seventeenth. I intended to bring a copy off—hum! . . . let me see.” He slapped his pockets, discovered the paper, and went on, “Yes, here it is. I fancied perhaps you would care to see it.”

Lady Barracough held out her hand. “Of course . . . many thanks for the thought.”

Harrison opened the paper and pointed out the paragraph. It was headed—

“A STORY FROM THE SEA,”

and after a considerable space devoted to non-essentials, proceeded thus—

“On the night of the thirteenth a most gallant rescue was accomplished by the well-known Lady Barracough and the ladies who are associated with her in an endeavour to persuade the Board of Trade to grant certificates to women candidates for the sea.

“It appears,” Lady Barracough read out, “that on Saturday last, when Londoners were listening to the howling gale from the warm shelter of their beds, Lady Barracough and her young friends were entering what is known as the ‘chops of the Channel.’ It was a wild night, moonless, starless, and full of wind and rain—”

“Sounds as though he were describing a teacup,” Sadie Cole interjected.

“Or a church with the roof off,” Harrison laughed. “Never mind, he means well.”

“At two o’clock, or thereabouts,” Lady Barracough proceeded with a grim smile, “a rocket was seen, and the *Southern Cross* immediately stood away on her errand of mercy. With indomitable pluck these ladies pushed on, and came near enough to see, dimly in a mist of flying spray, a large sailing ship on the point of sinking.

"There was no time to be lost. It was evident that the vessel was *in extremis*, so these frail women, whom we are accustomed to laugh at, and even on occasion to patronise, launched their boats, and one by one succeeded in saving eighteen souls, and bringing them to the yacht.

"It is deeds like this which give the lie to our critics, who insist we are becoming luxurious and soft; it is deeds like this which make us men proud of our women-folk, and ready to fight and die for them. These ladies are heroes. Whatever may be their aim, they have proved themselves worthy those grand sea warriors of our race from whom they are sprung, and we suggest that the nation might do worse than attempt some means of showing them how we appreciate their pluck. For heroism is a thing we all struggle, more or less effectively, to attain. It can be won at the sword's point, it can be won on the railway, it can be won in all our great cities; but the heroism which is wrung from the teeth of a gale of wind amidst the appalling thunder of Nature's strife, is a heroism to be proud of, and we are glad to recognise it."

Lady Barraclough set down the paper with moist eyes. "Tame! yet I wish it were true," she exclaimed. "But it is false!—false! There is not a word of truth in it beyond the aspirations of some of us."

"Of course," Harrison remarked, blandly folding the paper, "it is easy to see you wish to minimise your gallantry, Lady Barraclough. It does you credit."

"Credit? Nay, there is no credit at stake. We did not do this thing. Captain Carragh and his officers did it."

"The *Times* says otherwise," Harrison smiled.

"Then the *Times* lies, and it must retract. I shall make it my business to tell the real facts. What do you think, Sadie? Are we to do an obvious wrong—an obvious wrong to the officers and men of this ship—simply because some garbled account, published at the dictation of heaven knows who, is given in the *Times*?"

"I agree. It is unfair. But you observe," Sadie Cole remarked, "that the account mentions none of us by name. I doubt whether you will be able to get any retraction. Besides, we certainly were the first to sight the wreck."

"And very ready to hand over the *onus* of it to Captain Carragh and his officers."

"The paper does not go into details," Harrison put in.

"No, but it infers . . . it infers."

"Inference is not proof, Lady Barracrough."

"It is not. It is worse. It is the subtle thing ; the underhand argument, the unspeakable phrase, against which we all, who are honest, strive and fight. The century is crammed with innuendo, aspersion, tittle-tattle. Any ink-goblin who can tell a spiced tale is a *force majeure* in these days ; any eavesdropping maid or valet is a *persona grata* now with the papers. Spare me. I loathe the system ; espionage, falsehood, character-stealing—all are one ; all are welcome at the office of that panderer to modern vices, the morning paper."

"I admit it," Harrison ejaculated. "I admit it ; it is a thing we have imported with our cousins from across the Pond, and often it hits us shipowners very hard."

"That's one for my nation, anyway," Sadie laughed.

"And it does not help the situation," Lady Barracrough asserted. "Captain Harrison, you are versed in these matters. What do you advise ?"

"I advise silence, Lady Barracrough."

"I can't promise that ; still, is there nothing else I can do ?"

"There is," Harrison returned, suddenly becoming serious. "You can make it up to Captain Carragh and his officers and crew. You can make it up, not only to them, but you can do the whole race of sailor-men a service of which you'll be proud when you come to the end of things."

"Lady Barracrough, I'm a plain man, and I have been a sailor, and know that what I say is true. You think you have hurt our people by this action which the papers attribute to you ; papers, mind—not the *Times* only, but all. Very well, you deny it, but it will have no effect. Take my word for it, the way to recompense Jack is not to conduct a newspaper war on his behalf, but to take him by the hand and make a friend of him. He wants no speechifying—he gets enough of that from his agitators ; he wants no tracts, printed in big letters, as though he were a child, for he gets his fill of them ; but he wants just a bit of human sympathy ; a bit of kindly thought ; a modified edition of Miss Weston's work among the blue-jackets. He wants to feel he is consulted, that the nation remembers him—and all the isms and ologies in the world won't touch this."



Lady Barraclough watched him. "Go on," she said ; "I am learning—every day I am learning."

"You think you are hurting our men by taking from them the chance they had for advertisement," Harrison resumed. "But what is the use of advertisement to a sailor? It won't help him with the crimps; it won't give him better accommodation, food, or put more men into the fore-castle. He is never at home. He isn't somebody's soap. He doesn't want to be taken up by the ladies, as they do out West, and kissed. He wants to feel his feet, to know that his government has an eye on his work and his behaviour. That he is represented there—that he can poll his vote. Will retraction from the *Times* bring him any of these things? And if you get retraction—which you won't do, I'll dare swear, except in small letters at the bottom of a column no one reads—well, what happens?

"The Board of Trade hears of it, in time, and it comes along and holds out its hand and says, 'Good boys! Very good boys! You shall be remembered . . . you shall have a tick-tick. A nicee, nicee tick-tick that costs pounds!'

"Lady Barraclough," Harrison continued, warming to his subject, "if our men hanker after anything in the way of recognition, they hanker after an order—not a frying-pan medal any idiot can earn by jumping into the surf to save a nursery-maid; nor a chronometer-balance watch, or pair of binoculars, inscribed with the thanks of a loving country—but an order, a star. A thing a man may wear on his breast and be proud of.

"Why, our officers aren't babies, and as a general rule you will find they have both watches and binoculars. I give you my word, Lady Barraclough, you couldn't find a smarter set of men in the Merchant Service than the men I picked out for you. I did it with an object. I wanted you to see what like a British sailor is when he is put to it, and I must tell you that it is no small thing they have done, setting aside the fact of the wreck altogether. You are in charge—they are responsible; you give the orders—they have to sit still, and quake. Why? Well, you can scarcely argue that women are really competent to stand a ship's decks in all weathers; and I may tell you that it takes some nerve, to say nothing of other trifles, to make



a man sit down and watch orders given that may land him in . . . well, well, I'll set that aside ; but I think I have proved to you that British sailors aren't devoid of pluck—and now you propose to spoil the whole thing by telling the *Times* it is an ass.

"Of course it's an ass. It is as gullible as any other morning paper, and not quite as smart as some ; but you won't help our men, or the service, or the British Mercantile Marine generally by telling it so. And, if you will allow me, that is what I want you to do."

"I am afraid you hope too much from me, Captain Harrison. I am no power in the land."

"You will pardon me if I say that I fancy I have a very good notion of what you can and cannot do."

"Nevertheless," Lady Barraclough replied, as Harrison looked up with his shrewd smile, "I shall make it my business to represent the matter in its true light. But as to the other suggestion, who can say . . . I know so little."

"You know just enough to be able to make a very strong report, for instance, to Lord Stafferly," Harrison asserted. "And with Carragh's help, I venture to say, you might put a backbone into the office on Tower Hill. Think it over, Lady Barraclough. There are some amazing problems. Amazing."

"In what direction ?"

"Ask Carragh. He's a man of a thousand. D'you suppose I would have sent him with you unless I had his measure ? But . . . I must be going . . . and as for that affair of the *Times*, I think I would leave it alone. Of course you know best what happened ; but the papers are generally pretty stiffnecked, and you certainly have the credit.

"And now," he added, with a sudden change of manner, "if I may throw in a hint after so much talk, may I say that I understand the authorities over there"—he jerked his thumb to indicate Falmouth—"are arranging to give themselves a dinner. They have been hankering for an opportunity to advertise their town and their hospitality, and this seems to have come along as a little Godsend. I hear there are to be serenades, and a full-dress rehearsal of the civic dignitaries . . . er . . . in point of fact, I believe I see one of the boats coming off now, and, as I do

not wish to figure in the local newspaper, I'll just ask you to excuse a hasty exit."

"But this is nonsense, Captain Harrison. I can't think what——"

"Pardon, Lady Barraclough. I recognise your desire for anonymity—we all do. But the *Times*, you see—the *Times* . . ." He lifted his hat, shrugged his shoulders, and, looking the most sceptical of mortals, hastened to the gangway, and thence to his launch.

"Tell Captain Carragh," he cried to the officer, "that I hoped to see him. But I am due at Plymouth to-night, and must not wait. Hallo! here comes the deputation. Good-day! Landing-stage, there. . . . Full speed."

The great man was gone; but labouring up the bay was a harbour tug-boat, whose promenade was black with people—excursionists. Before her a group of yachts sparkled in the sunshine.

CHAPTER XVII

NOTORIETY

A WHITE-WINGED yawl heeling gently across the bay began it. She was clean and beautiful to look upon: there was just that touch of romance in her appearance that appealed to Lady Barraclough in this new world she had entered. She was so small, so tenderly fashioned, so dainty in shape and line; the men on her decks looked so fresh and sunburned; the women so smart—that Lady Barraclough came down the promenade and stood with lifted starers and a smile of pleasure to watch her pass.

The yawl approached, and as she raced by a man standing in the cockpit raised his cap and cried out, "Three cheers for the *Southern Cross*!" and a tinkling shout came over the sea to ruffle them. The yawl passed foaming into the distance with a flutter of handkerchiefs. The *Southern Cross* remained in silence.

Lady Barraclough placed John Stuart Mill on a deck chair and faced her companion. "Just as I was admiring her," she said pathetically. "What is to be done?"

"Guess we'll have to live it down," Sadie Cole announced.

"But meanwhile . . . meanwhile?"

"We must get to sea."

"But Captain Carragh and Violet are away."

"To-night, I mean, of course. Hush! I believe there are some more of them."

A pair of yachts danced past, going towards the blue gates of the sea, and they, too, as they came abreast, gave cheers—not for the *Southern Cross*, but for Lady Barraclough and her gallant helpers. They were small, ineffective things in the way of cheers, but behind them lay

a whole world of annoyance. It meant notoriety, and was a prelude to the advent of that black laden excursion boat. Lady Barraclough frowned, and as the bo'sun had made a move to summon the crew to respond to the cheers, she sent a message by Wo-sun to discourage him.

The crew growled consistently. They said they could not understand why 'er 'ighness should object to them receiving what they felt was their due. They lined the rails, however, and waved a response with sweat-rags and other implements of toil.

The excursion boat drew near, and as it crept up to the counter, a band of singularly inefficient musicians broke dolefully into "Rule Britannia;" then, as the steamer slowed, a hoarse shout came from her decks—

"Now then. . . All to-gether! Three cheers for the yat!"

The cheers were given—a concatenation of sound, very ineffectual.

Again the voice demanded, "Now then! All to-gether—this time. . . Three cheers for the ladies that sail her!"

The cheers rolled down upon them, humiliating, exasperatingly scornful to ears attuned for slights. Lady Barraclough frowned. Sadie Cole laughed, and with some of the others waved handkerchiefs. They said they could do nothing less. The steamer took a turn round the yacht, examining her, while the band strayed through three verses of "See the Conquering Hero comes," then stopped, and asked if the lady captain was on board.

Some one shouted "No," and the voice responded, "Well, we'll give 'er a look up when we'm comin' whome—to-night." And, with the band braying "Auld lang syne" and the whistle tootling like a gigantic cock, the paddles struck out and the excursionists moved on to their destination.

"Pandemonium!" Lady Barraclough exclaimed. "If this is notoriety, give me oblivion."

But the end was not yet. Before luncheon the navigators had been waited on by two local celebrities, the lord of the manor, a strolling dean, a party of Americans, and the town clerk.

They came in detachments, some in the care of Falmouth boatmen with a vast flutter of sails and dashing of spray ; some on launches and some on yachts. Falmouth seemed bent on doing its utmost to acknowledge the fact that at length it had a band of heroes comfortably cabined in the bay. They came out singly, in pairs, in crowds ; some were accompanied by suspicious-looking individuals in black morning coats and bowler hats, wielding fountain pens and carrying note-books. Some came surreptitiously up the gangway behind a photographic apparatus, and indulged in snapshots ; but all expressed regret that they were unable to see the heroes, and revenged themselves by taking pictures of the crew, the Chinaman, the door of Lady Barraclough's deck study.

But the incident that most annoyed the autocrat was the advent of the deputation—a set of florid gentlemen with bald heads and visible perspiration, who were accompanied by a beadle, or poker-bearer of sorts. They came up the gangway with a flourish and demanded to see Lady Barraclough. They bore, so one announced, an invitation from the mayor and aldermen and burgesses of the town of Falmouth, requesting the honour of Lady Barraclough's presence, and that of her officers, at a dinner to be given at the town hall on Thursday next.

The autocrat had refused to see any of those who had preceded, but, acting on Sadie Cole's advice, decided to strain a point in favour of the mayor ; especially as she hoped to be able through him to put a stop to this troublesome business.

The deputation bowed itself into the presence with a premonitory shuffle, and said, " Lady Barraclough ? "

" My name, sir," came in freezing accents. " Be seated."

The deputation disposed itself comfortably amidst the chairs, but the spokesman remained erect upon a pair of legs shaped like hams—moist of brow and nervous. " My lady," he said, " I am deputed by the mayor and aldermen to ask whether it would be convenient for you and your officers to dine at the town hall on Thursday next ; or whether, if that date does not meet with your approval, you would give me permission to say when——"

" It would certainly be most inconvenient," Lady Barraclough remarked.

"Then perhaps your ladyship would not mind suggesting a date?"

"Far from it, sir; I have no intention of suggesting a date. In point of fact we sail to-night."

Two of the deputation bobbed up, but at a sign from their spokesman subsided. "I regret it. I regret it extremely," said he. "I need hardly say, and I think I speak for all here present, that we have looked forward to the pleasure of marking, in some very small way, of course, our appreciation, nay, the appreciation of our town, and, through us, the appreciation of our country, at the very magnificent conduct——"

"Spare me!" Lady Barracrough ejaculated.

"It does your ladyship honour," said the man on the ham-like pedestal, as he drew a sleek finger and thumb down the angle of his jaw as though it were a nut and he desired to crack it.

"Honour! It is no honour to do one's duty. But in this case we have not done our duty. If you refer to what our crew accomplished then I am with you, but we—we—I, Lady Barracrough, if you wish, had nothing to do with it."

The deputation smiled a gentle, breezy, deprecating smile.

"Of course," said the spokesman, very pompous and perspiring, "we readily acknowledge the work the men did. But, if I may so express myself, men do not work without orders—they generally require leading, and I understand from the account in the *Times*——"

"Garbled! Garbled!" Lady Barracrough shot out. "Not a word of truth in it."

Again the spokesman fingered a smooth-shaven chin, his lips wobbling, his eyes staring.

"Pardon, my lady, the *Times* says——"

"The *Times* is a fool!"

"There are moments, my lady, when I confess I agree with that sentiment, but now——"

"Captain Carragh was in charge," Lady Barracrough accentuated. "The crew accomplished the rescue to which you refer. Now, sir, I put a question—if I consent to delay my departure until Thursday, or later if necessary, will you dine the crew and their officers instead of Lady Barracrough and my friends—will you?"

The spokesman was uncertain. He fingered his chin, and felt that he could not take upon himself to effect so sweeping an alteration. The deputation thought the same. They wagged bald heads together, and presumed the proper authority would recompense the men—as heretofore and always. They said as much in middle-class English, and finally agreed that it was a question for his worship the mayor.

"Precisely. And your opinion of the result, sir?"

The deputation meditatively shook its head and the spokesman translated. "I fear," he said, "we cannot express one. Personally I should be inclined to say he will not care to alter his plans."

"Of course not. Lady Barraclough and a pack of smart girl heroines you would be prepared to dine—but the sailors, common, horny-handed, illiterate, you know nothing of."

"Pardon, my lady, I scarcely went so far——"

"Naturally—but don't you think it is the corollary?"

"I fear you are taking me beyond my subject. You see I can only go, the deputation can only go——"

"I admit it. I don't blame you. Personally you cannot answer. I know, though, very well what would be his worship's reply, and I do not care to wait for it. I shall not alter my plans. We sail to-night, and I shall dine my men myself.

"But," she continued as the deputation rose to depart, "there is one thing you, or rather the mayor of Falmouth, might do for me, and I ask you to do it. The *Times*' report of what occurred is false. No women had a hand in the life-saving. No woman gave orders. The whole of it was carried out by Captain Carragh and his crew, and in justice to them I ask you to make the facts known, and to have a notice inserted in the paper to that effect."

The deputation stared.

"Of course," said the spokesman, "I will do what I can to rectify the mistake; but you know our small local paper has no weight. The account is in the *Times*, *Standard*, *Telegraph*, *Mail*, and all the rest of them. We can make no headway in such a case. . . . I am sorry, of course, and I will do what I can, but——"

Lady Barraclough rose and touched the bell.

"Precisely," she said. "But!"

The deputation felt this was no occasion to waste words, and gathering its legs and arms together moved placidly to the gangway.

"A most extra-ordinary woman," they said as they boarded the launch. "A lady, too—and in such a hat!"

"Animated hams," said Lady Barraclough.

But she referred to the strange likeness some of them bore to the stuff they sold.

If the whole thing was annoying to the last degree before lunch, at tea-time there came a missive from the Earl of Stafferly which threw all that had gone before into the region of forgotten pin-pricks.

Hargreaves, fresh from a dreamy interlude in the bo'sun's arms, and carrying visible tokens of their power to crush on her smart apron, entered the study bearing a salver.

"A letter, my lady," she announced.

"Thank you. Wait."

Lady Barraclough, bland and resigned, sat back in her chair to open it. She commenced to read, and as Hargreaves was prepared to vouch, sparks flew from her eyes, her hair became stiff, and the tip of her nose wobbled. She finished reading, then looked up and said, "Call Mrs. Cole," in the voice of one prepared to do murder.

Hargreaves fled.


Sadie Cole found Lady Barraclough pacing the room with her hands clasped behind her. She paused at once on recognising the attitude, and said, "Anything wrong?"

"Wrong?" said Lady Barraclough in a dull, passionless tone. "Listen to this," and commenced to read.

"HOUSE OF COMMONS,

"*Monday Night.*

"MY DEAR HONORIA,—Whatever you have done, or whatever you have left undone, I congratulate you on having brought the bees about my ears. Your letter says one thing, the *Times* another; but as I have no doubt



the papers give the correct record, and that you out of the goodness of your heart simply desire not to appear, I hope you will accept my good wishes. It was nobly done. Congratulations, too, for Violet and Mrs. Cole—in fact, to all who helped. And, having said so much, I now turn to the effects which I foreshadowed above.

“They have been far-reaching, and I fear that if you desired anonymity you are doomed to fail—in point of fact, if you desired to throw dust in the eyes of the newspapers, it is always wise to prepare your own report and send it in by some roundabout channel. As it is, you have become famous at a bound. The clubs talk of little else, and I am the subject of congratulation wherever I go. I confess the prospect of question-time alarmed me before I went down to the House ; and there my misgivings were verified—amply verified. Little Tommy was on his legs at the first opportunity to ask a question of which he had given private notice.

“Had the Honourable Member for the West Division of Scalpington seen the account in the *Times* of the heroic conduct of Lady Barraclough and her friends? These ladies, as he believed the House knew, were doing their utmost to prevail upon a hard-hearted Government to extend the existing regulations by granting certificates to women navigators. These ladies, so said the account to which he referred, had rendered a service to humanity which demanded recognition. They had saved the lives of fifteen men and three women—persons doomed to an early grave by the villainy of some vessel at present unknown. He, Tommy, desired particularly to learn whether the Government intended to take any steps in this matter of surreptitious escape from the consequences of collision. It was a growing trouble, and here they had an instance of what might never have been heard of but for the gallantry of Lady Barraclough and her friends.

“He asked the President of the Board of Trade whether, in view of what had occurred, he could see his way to initiate some system by which damaged ships on reaching port should be examined and the crew kept in sight, until some satisfactory explanation was forthcoming ; and also, whether he could now see his way to relax the arbitrary regulation against which these ladies

fought ; and whether, having regard to their brilliant action, he would be able to recognise in some fitting manner the heroism, the wonderful heroism of which they had been accused.

"Of course the House roared. It always does when Tommy is on his legs. Then the President of the Board of Trade got up to reply—you know his manner. He said : 'I have no knowledge of the circumstances to which my honourable friend refers ; but since receiving the notice I have read the account. At the moment, however, I feel that it would be impossible for me to say more than that the matter shall have my attention ; and if I find, on inquiry, the circumstances are as reported, I will take the opinion of my colleagues and give it to the House.'

"But Tommy was not satisfied with this. He asked whether the President of the Board of Trade would put himself in communication with Lady Barraclough and ascertain the facts. Hatherly demurred. This brought up the Irishmen, who demanded to know whether there was one law for men and another for women, &c. Then, as there seemed a probability of further bull-baiting, Hatherly sent a note round to where I was listening behind the Speaker's chair, to know whether I thought it possible to obtain an authentic version by to-morrow.

"I agreed to try and have sent by first mail with the detailed facts a copy of the paper, in order that you may judge. Will you therefore wire me, at once, what to say, and relieve the tension ?

"Your affectionate brother,

"STAFFERLY."

Lady Barraclough looked up from this epistle.

"What are we to do ?" she demanded.

"Run," said Sadie Cole, with a merry twinkle.

"You are right. There is nothing else that we can do. But," Lady Barraclough went on, marching to and fro the room, "but if I had dreamed when I started that I should be the butt of Mr. Ashton Jones, I should never have come. My dear, send for the chief engineer and tell him to get steam ready at once—at once."

"But the wire—the answer to Lord Stafferly ?"



"My agents shall send it—after we have sailed."

"Capital."

"Hasten the engineer, my dear. Hasten him," said Lady Barraclough.

Sadie Cole ran out at once and found Billy Rathbone, to whom she gave her orders with a vivacity that took that young gentleman's breath away.

"Steam, Mrs. Cole?" he questioned.

"Right off, please."

"Oh, but that's impossible. We can't raise steam in a minute."

"Not if I ask you?" she flashed.

"I'm afraid I can't do much, Mrs. Cole," Rathbone laughed, "even for you. You see it's the chief engineer, and he has all sorts of cranks about hurrying boilers, contraction and expansion of plates, and all the rest of it."

"Let me talk to him," said Mrs. Cole with dancing eyes.

"He would succumb, oh! he would succumb—but let me have first go. It's dirty down in the engine-room."

Rathbone took his departure, and by the time Carragh returned with the launch he found the ship throbbing to the roar of imprisoned steam, the invalids ashore, and everything in readiness for an early departure.

Lady Barraclough met her friends on the gangway, and approaching Carragh, said—

"We will sail as soon as you can make it convenient to take us out. Violet, if you are tired, I am sure Captain Carragh will do all he can to help you."

Carragh glanced over at Miss Ramsden and caught her eyes fixed on him. She smiled and said, "Will you?" Then Carragh hastened also to see the engineer, and seeing him, wondered why he had not sent a messenger.

An hour later, in the silence of the coming night, the *Southern Cross* stole out of the bay, and heading for the Lizard, passed into the crimson dreamland brooding over the gates of the Channel.

But in His Majesty's Post Office two telegrams awaited transmission. One said—

" The Earl of Stafferly,

" House of Commons.

" Lady Barraclough and friends sailed for the West
this afternoon.

" Agents."

The other—

" The Earl of Stafferly,

" Westminster.

" Tell ' Tommy ' he's a ratter.

" Sadie Cole.'

CHAPTER XVIII

HONORIA, LADY BARRACLOUGH

NIGHT closed in upon them as they crept down the purple coast. Astern, at nine o'clock, were the twin lights of St. Anthony, the one rhythmically sweeping the horizon, the other fixed and staring across the dreaded Manacles.

But Lady Barracrough scarcely recognised her environment ; it was sufficient that they were moving, that the sea was calm, and that Falmouth with its fluttering desires and misleading newspapers was left behind.

At her side walked Violet Ramsden ; it was company without companionship. Neither spoke except at rare intervals—they marched.

Across Lady Barracrough's brain there moved a new train of thought—at least, in the first moment of recognition, she told herself it was new ; but it was not new. It was very old—nearly as old as Lady Barracrough in point of fact. No wonder it looked grey ; no wonder it seemed a dream. The mist of years had wrapped it long.

A small child strayed amidst a plantation of trees at the edge of the park—Lord Stafferly, her father's, park—and at her side a handsome boy. He was her senior by perhaps eight years, and the girl worshipped him. But the boy, although he worshipped too, had other things to think of—his pony, a model yacht, a toy steam-engine, his bicycle—for he was a lad of energetic moods, and if the girl had consented to ride a bicycle or pony with him, he might have endured her worship further. But a girl could not ride a bicycle in those days, nor, in her case, a pony ; for she was a weakly thing, not beautiful, not brilliant, and very puny—still, she loved the boy, and at

the skirt of the woods, catching him by the arm, looked into his face to say so.

Poor, forward, baby child ! Lady Barraclough, staring into the darkness, saw her standing there, tiptoe, eager, waiting ; and saw the contemptuous frown of the boy who stung back instead of kissing. Long ago . . . long, long ago. Oh ! the heartbreak, the weariness of life at ten—tears swelled. The child's eyes were her only beauty, they brightened at the magic of her tears, yet the boy saw nothing. He turned away, slashing his leggings with a new whip—a gold-topped whip that was his latest treasure.

The girl's face took new lines at this, and she struck her hands together. "I hate you !" she said, "and I'll never love you again." The boy laughed. The girl ran home and cried.

Lady Barraclough, stalking beside her friend, silent, grim of face, impossible of hat, saw it all, as in a glass one sees one's face. She remembered the heartache of those days ; remembered the sobbed declaration at her mother's knee, and heard again the dear, soft voice speaking words of comfort, trivial, petting words, which, moreover, were ineffectual to remove the sting. Then how the years swiftly leaped aside—she saw herself grown tall ; a maze of hair and dark, flashing eyes her only beauties. Tall—but weakly ; a child in years—a woman by infirmity ; quick of brain—slow of feet ; and here again the pain grew bitter.

The lad, no longer a lad, was returned from the Soudan, whither he had been with his regiment ; he was strong, vivacious, manly—and beside him, half hiding him, was a bevy of women. He talked, laughed, joked with them all ; and she, being one of them, accepted some small crumbs.

It was possible, just possible, she thought, that he would remember as she remembered ; that he would be more thoughtful now, less outspoken—but he said nothing, only laughed with all who came his way—laughed and flirted.

"A male flirt," said Lady Barraclough to her conscious self, "is a despicable thing. In all humanity there is nothing lower, nothing more despicable" . . . And there flashed a recollection of one snatched kiss. She with her

face held up, white, quiet, in dreamland ; he looking down, radiant. " Why, Honoria, I declare you've grown quite pretty." The words died with the kiss ; but they burned her memory for years—pretty !

A contemptuous oscillation of the rather long arms was the only sign, had Violet Ramsden sought one, of her companion's momentary annoyance. They passed down the deck together, walking systematically from end to end ; but the friend who walked with Honoria, Lady Barraclough, wore the habiliments of those lords of creation we all revere.

She was twenty now, he a man of the world. The fighting was done. His regiment resting on its laurels. They had been in some of the hottest corners of the war, and their meed of praise rolled in the drawing-rooms. The two constantly met at this time, for, since that kiss, it had been necessary to act a while, and the phrase, too, accentuating her beauty—hers !—must be lived down. She continued in paradise for perhaps six months ; then one night she came upon him in a darkened conservatory, looking into the eyes of a brilliant woman, a leader of the set in which they moved, and heard him say . . . Well, does it matter what he said ? How small he was hereafter, what a pigmy, how dwindling, is the thing that stands out like a burning house against the black night sky. How he injured not only himself but that imperfect edifice, that half-formed, passionate, and clever soul, known to those who care to read these pages as Honoria, Lady Barraclough ; and how, too, mankind suffered under the lashing. All men were what he taught her one could be ; all men were the gadflies he proved himself to be ; all men had the same contempt for honour, for duty, for love, that he showed her one held. A mirage oppressed the world when Lady Barraclough stared upon it. It became gross, distorted, sensual—a place for persons with brooms and a pot of incense—a place to be purged. For, had it not been noted that Honoria, Lady Barraclough, was afflicted with too long arms ; with a round back ; with feet and a gait that shadowed a return to monkeydom ?

Through the darkness, staring straight before her, Lady Barraclough marched with Violet Ramsden at her side. The memories were bitter, the pose suggestive of humilia-

tion—hands crossed behind her, dangling; a head pushed forward, prominent of brow; feet that are known as beetle-squashers. Of all the prettiness God and her fathers had given her, Lady Barraclough had none remaining but a piercing eye and a tongue of silver.

When she spoke men crowded to listen. They came away with tingling ears, struck by her beauty of phrase and her harshness of verdict. Man the terrible, the lustful. Man! The sentences lashed. A monster only to be touched with prongs—to be annihilated—driven from the face of the earth so that purity might evolve. Man! . . . but that was long ago, before she came out here, and now, it seemed, there were others also—men of high motive, purity, gentleness. The thought made her writhe. Her father stood before her speaking in the softly-educated tone she had inherited from him.

"Because one is a cad," he said, "you must not judge all by the same standard." But in the whirl of angry denunciation the words had fallen as though they had not been spoken. She heard nothing. Bitterness filled the girlish heart; the sob of torn ideals, wrecked hopes, and humiliation filled her world. It was a cold, grey, unresponsive world. In it were two species—those who trusted and those who preyed. Yet now across the mists came that sentence, "Because one is a cad you must not judge all men cads." It drummed on ears newly attuned to listen. Had she heard? Had she remembered? Then what had blinded her to the fact of her father's life, her brother's—a dozen others whom she knew were good? Something far-reaching? Something undeniably sorrowful. Something which, at this moment, Honoria, Lady Barraclough wished had never been heard. The thoughtless speech of a male thing who was a flirt; unstable, of no stamina—a human butterfly!

She looked up; some one had spoken. Violet's voice reiterated the sentence, "You are tired, dear; shall we go downstairs?"

A soft hand-touch; the echo of a voice far back in her head. "No, but I have thoughts. The memories crowd out here." Then again silence and the interminable array of facts mentally reviewed; the perception of lost opportunity; the knowledge that in life there goes hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, within touch of all who seek—

kindness, cruelty ; love, hate ; happiness, misery ; aspiration, hopelessness.

The march went on doggedly, without recognition, to and fro the deck.

It was dark—light stood in Lady Barraclough's path. The night was still—the noise of great waters welled in Lady Barraclough's ears. The engines sang back to the hissing bow wave. Stars peeped out of the blue vault casting little silvery tracks across the deeper blue—they were footprints leading Lady Barraclough into realms hitherto forgotten, or, at all events, ignored. All men were not black. All souls were not steeped in crime, lust, degradation : there were others who breathed the higher life. She wondered now they had remained so long unnoticed. Of a certitude some lived to work, to push higher, and without chance of payment, even of recognition.

Her thoughts fell back on that black night of the gale that had been so cruelly mauled in the papers. "Women and children first!" The soft hearts of hard men—men who swore, shouted, and had obnoxious habits—they demanded first and above all things care for the women and children. Lady Barraclough shrank at the knowledge.

The wreck loomed big in her imagination to-night. She saw the eager faces turned upward in the glare of electric lamps watching the swaying basket. She heard the cry of men standing in their cockle-shell boats—"Steady there ! Go easy. Mind what you've got hold of !"—and saw the atom passed into safety—white, breathless, clad in a sailor's jacket. That man was a hero. Yet who of them all was it who had done this thing ? Had he bragged of it ? Had he shouted of his self-abnegation ? If so, the word had not reached Lady Barraclough's ears.

She marched grimly with dangling arms ; arms that were too long, and acknowledged the fact with lips that kept silence.

Again, had not Walton returned from the toil and anguish of that night wet, cold, and with a broken arm ? and did he shout his deeds, his prowess ? Not a word ! A sentence accentuated the fact as Lady Barraclough leaned forward searching for inspiration—"Suppose I came down on something when she turned turtle ?"

Was that man, too, one of those who preyed? And if by chance that stone might be honestly flung, did not his action countervail? Was it not a make-weight, a palliation? But who should judge whether he preyed? Was Honoria, Lady Barraclough, a person equipped with the soul-reading apparatus, which should judge?—and was she competent?

The fingers of Honoria, Lady Barraclough, drummed on the knuckles of one hand as the question presented itself for recognition. There followed others. And if she were incompetent, who could judge? Then into the torturing silence strayed a ray of light—"The actions of men may only be read by the sympathetic student of human nature judging broadly and without personal bias."

Was she biassed? Had she judged fairly, and always?

The fingers of Lady Barraclough drummed staccato on the knuckles of her hung-down hand. She looked up. She was about to speak; but something checked her utterance and the walk went on. Once she was conscious of Violet's solicitude; of a gentle touch on the shoulder, and a swift glance from eyes half veiled in the darkness; but neither spoke, the pace remained unslackened—up the deck, seventy paces; turn, three steps, down the deck—again seventy paces.

She had done, even lately, and since the wreck, an injustice to these men. She had done an injustice also to those friends of hers of whom her companion was the chief. In a letter written in scathing denunciation of woman's aim she had cavilled at human nature; laid women on the rack and sneered at the possibility of allowing the sexes to mingle without contamination. She had also maligned Walton, whom she had seen only a few hours earlier carried up the gangway sick with pain. Why had she done these things? By what process of reasoning could she persuade herself that she had acted rightly, written fairly, or criticised to the point? and whither was her argument taking her?

She marched to champion mankind. Now, after years of unseeing life she lived to see. Now, after years of perilous denunciation, she marched to retract.

A travesty of justice, surely, for any ridden soul; a torture unnecessarily severe and late in the coming; but

evolved as our fathers were evolved ; reasoned as we have learned to reason, even the most apathetic of us, the most callous. What started it ? Why did this bleak line of thought assail her now ? Why was she compelled to retrace her steps and begin again ? The subtle influence of the sea was upon her ; the clean airiness of the vast solitudes wrapped her about ; the hand of God stood very near. They floated buoyantly, but how little a touch would bring the great waters about their ears, how small a catastrophe—and then ? Well, in that moment, man would succour them—man !

The thought strove for utterance. Lady Barraclough was tired of strife. She had lived and fought for the faith, and now, when the grey hairs hung visibly grey, and the round back was more noticeably round, it had come to her lot to say things she had never dreamed of saying ; to do things she had never thought of doing. What had taught her ? The sea. What had disturbed her equanimity now ?

Harrison began it. The man of brusque speech and vigorous logic, he had commenced it, slashing amidst the potsherds of broken ideas, trembling judgments, spilled wisdom, and loose reasoning. Harrison, red, choleric, brazenly a man—and following him, Carragh, the yachts that cheered her ; the impossible excursionists, the deputation, and the knowledge that she, Lady Barraclough, had been fated to steal from those who had won it—heroism.

The recollections thrilled. Lady Barraclough paused and touched her companion on the arm. They stood a moment facing each other on the still promenade.

"My dear," said the soft, ringing voice, "I have come a long distance to-night."

"Yes—about a mile, I fancy——"

"No, down the paths of fifty years." Then, as Violet searched for her meaning, holding that unlovely form to her, "The sea has a note I had not learned . . . Let us go to bed."

CHAPTER XIX

LUNARS

FIVE a.m. on a still, calm morning. A cluster of small, half-hexagons, far away and very soft on the landward horizon ; a dozen snake-like splotches scattered hitherward, thitherward, all carrying a central column and sometimes a pair of sticks, like pins, on either side as equipoise.

The columns were funnels, the pins, masts ; but they were far off, curtained in the blue haze and only by the smoke-trail was it possible to discover how they moved. Those with the smoke lifted high and straight above them were steamers bound south ; these with the smoke lying back from them like a kite-string, steamers bound home. There was a light air from the north, and in charge of the watch were Sadie Cole and Lilian Roberts.

Five a.m. is the time for tea and hot toast on the bridge of a mailship ; tea and a pantile in the forecastle ; it is also the time for a general move in the mailship world, the time of rattling shovels in the stoke-hold and energetic banging of dough in the bakehouse. In the tramps, where no bakehouse exists, the galley funnel has marked the cook's activity an hour since. It is the hour when people begin to wake up and recognise what has been entrusted to their guardianship this hour or more ; when the mate of the short-handed tramp on a long winter's night takes his glasses and searches for possible malingerers on the look-out, and snaps questions as to the brilliancy of the lights. Yet here, on the bridge of the *Southern Cross*, two ladies slipped to and fro, chattering and laughing over tea and toast, and the sun was already clear of the mists of dawn.

The tea was abominable, of course. That goes without saying when you remember it was brewed by the hand of men whose method is to boil the water over the leaves ; but it was less noticeably atrocious than on that day when they first commented on its constituent parts. For the sea air provides a wonderful appetite, and one takes stewed tea with as much relish, when one is acclimatised, as stewed pears. So Sadie Cole and Lilian Roberts accepted the tannin as they accepted the toast, and were generously forgetful of the dangers involved. That was at five o'clock. But at seven, if the sun has climbed high enough, the navigator gets out his sextant, and the senior officer enters the chart-room to take the time.

The chronometers, usually a trio of them, live in the chart-room in an air-tight case under a hinged flap which may be raised at will. There is a thermometer in the case and a register of the temperature is part and parcel of the process by which the instruments are hedged. The case itself is never opened except by the senior navigating officer, and then only to wind the chronometers, compare them and note the temperature ; for on an equable temperature depends the maintenance of a steady rate.

Lilian Roberts having decided the sun was sufficiently lifted to present a true image, came out with her sextant and stood to measure the altitude. Of course she was premature ; an hour later would have made all the difference ; but Lilian Roberts had a notion to experiment. She refused to be bound by the laws of man, and Sadie Cole, in her capacity of senior officer, went into the chart-room to take the time. It is a simple problem. Every one who has travelled has seen the officer at certain hours of the day and night, standing at the wing of the bridge looking through the telescope of his sextant at something on the horizon no one else can perceive ; and they have heard him shout "time," then read off the arc a certain number of degrees and minutes and seconds, and repeat the operation three or even five times. The meaning of this is that at a certain moment, when time is called, the chronometers are noted, and the altitude of the sun or star is read off, and with these two factors the longitude of the ship is ascertained. But without the chronometers the altitude is useless—as useless as would be the chronometers without the altitude.

Now Lilian Roberts stood in the wing of the bridge, making a very pretty picture against the glare of the morning sun, and she was about to shout "time" in the orthodox manner, and proceed to call out the measured angle, when from the chart-room window came Sadie Cole's clear voice—

"Say, Lil, what's wrong with the clocks?"

Miss Roberts lowered her sextant and looked over her shoulder. "The clocks?" she questioned. "What clocks?"

"Chronometers, silly—say, don't make a song, but come."

Miss Roberts moved with a dignified air past the listening quartermaster and entered the chart-room. Sadie Cole had withdrawn her face from the window and was bending over with her ear close to the jealously-guarded case. "I can't hear a tick," she remarked, "and it's twelve o'clock by one of them and three by another and ten by another—what time is it?"

"Six five," came in sepulchral tones.

"And what's the difference of time between here and Greenwich?"

Lilian Roberts turned up the chart, and with her finger on a pencilled line almost due south of the Lizard, said, "We're about here . . . say six west, that's twenty-four minutes later than Greenwich; but of course we may not be quite there, and if they are stopped——"

"They are stopped," Sadie Cole announced; "and if I'm not a thousand miles out, it stops our cruise."

"Nonsense—they can be restarted."

"Can you do it?—and if so, how?"

Lilian Roberts with puckered forehead and annoyed manner had to admit she would not like to start them: "It's a thing the Hibernian didn't tell us about," she explained. "And I don't remember reading it at the schools."

"No," said Mrs. Cole, "and this isn't the place to practise. We've got to climb down . . . tell the men we've got no more *nous* than a pea-nut, and let them come in and fix things straight again. That's how I figure it out, anyhow. What's yours?"

"I think we ought to call Violet," said Miss Roberts.

"Call away," said Sadie Cole; "and while you are

about it, call Captain Carragh and the other officers too. Guess I'll get on the bridge and look after my end of the show."

But Miss Roberts would have nothing to do with Captain Carragh. She sent for Guffles, and Guffles decided that she had forgotten to wind the things, and they would have to take lunars.

She spoke quite briskly on the subject. Lunars had fallen into sad disuse. A ship-master in these days scarcely dreamed of checking his chronometers by lunars. He belonged to the new school, the school that trafficked in rule-of-thumb, and Miss Guffles was of opinion that lunars should be revived. She said they were just that kind of problem which gave a fillip to the brain of the navigator, and she welcomed the opportunity which had come to them. She considered it in the light of a Godsend.

Violet said she did not much mind about the fillip to the brain, or put much faith in the Godsend, but she would like to know precisely where they were, and the sooner Sydney Guffles got Greenwich mean time, the better it would be for everybody.

The quartermaster with his ear to the window decided this was a nasty one, but Miss Guffles put on her pince-nez and set to work, with a cup of tea to refresh her. She unfastened the air-tight case, turned the valve at the back of the chronometer, and wound each one with the care of a zealot. Then she opened a second valve and twisted the hands to an approximate hour. Having done this and listened carefully to the beat of each, she closed the case and prepared for business.

"Let me see," she said, "yes—I shall require two assistants, please. Sadie, will you help?"

Sadie preferred to have nothing to do with lunars, and said so. Miss Ramsden admitted she knew nothing about them, and would prefer to call Captain Carragh, but Miss Guffles waxed indignant at the suggestion and sent for Helen. Helen, when she arrived, looked sadly at her chief. "Then you haven't wound them for two days," she asserted. "You had better have let me help. You never could remember."

Miss Guffles shook her off with—"Never mind, I will soon set it right—get your sextant, there's a dear."

In ten minutes the three ladies had gathered, at the bidding of their chief, sextants, Nautical Almanac, Astronomical Tables, Norie, Raper, Ainsley, several pencils, two or three scribbling-books, and Miss Guffles had commenced to pour over Norie on lunars.

Twice she took up her sextant, and with Lilian Roberts and Helen Granger, moved towards the door, and on each occasion she paused and said, "No—that's not it," and finally, "we must have a fourth to take the time—call Lucy Patterson."

So Lucy Patterson came up rubbing her eyes and declaring she was "drefful s'eeepy," and yawning until the others declared she had better go back to bed if she intended to be disagreeable and hinder things, or they would be compelled to call Elsie Collins, who had only just gone off watch. Lucy brightened up at this and consented to act as timekeeper, but before Miss Guffles had decided whether she or Helen had better take the "distances," she cried out to know which clock she must use. Then Miss Guffles came back and gave instructions. "You see," she said, "we are going to find the mean time, and we must use the ship's clock and call it apparent time."

Lucy agreed that would be quite simple. Then again they moved towards the bridge, but had not reached their stations before Miss Guffles paused, and beckoning to her friends, returned to the chart-room.

"It is an unusual problem," she said, "and I fear I am a trifle rusty. Let's have another look at Norie."

She opened the book, and sitting down beside the desk, leaned her chin on her hands and commenced to read.

"Now, girls—just listen do, and take notes of what you have to do . . . 'The best method of ascertaining the time at Greenwich by celestial observations taken at sea—'"

"As though we need take them anywhere else!" Helen Granger interjected.

Miss Guffles went on reading—

"'Is that of measuring the angular distance between the moon'—that's yours, Helen—'and sun'—that's yours Lilian—'or moon and certain stars near the ecliptic' . . . let's see—what is the ecliptic?"

"Oh, does it matter?" Lilian Roberts questioned.

"Of course it matters ; if we don't take the right thing for the ecliptic, how can we get lunars ?"

This seemed unanswerable, and into the silence came Lucy Patterson's hummed comment, "Don't know . . . don't know . . . don't care a teeny weeny crap."

"The ecliptic,' Lilian Roberts read out gravely, 'is a great circle representing the apparent annual path of the sun in the heavens' . . . we can't take that !" she added, as they all paused staring at the desk.

But Miss Guffles was not to be stopped so lightly. She knitted her brows and said, "No, I remember now . . . yes, I see. It's all right . . . now—where was I ? Oh ! 'ecliptic, usually called a lunar observation'—well, we knew *that*—'both on account of the quick motion of the moon in her orbit, and the frequent opportunities that offer for taking such observations ; for in favourable weather distances may be taken at any time' . . . yes . . . hum ! . . . hum ! . . . 'thirteen degrees, or at the rate of one minute of a degree in two minutes of time' . . . hu-m—m—m !—yes—'the corresponding time at Greenwich will be known within one minute of time, and *hence* the *longitude* within fifteen minutes of a degree.' See ?"

"Of course," said Helen.

"Simple enough," said Lilian Roberts.

"Not a bit . . . bit . . . bit," said Lucy Patterson, and Miss Guffles jumped round to suggest, "Do speak English—and it has nothing to do with you. You take the time."

"Deevie," said Miss Patterson, and "tweet !"

"To facilitate this important problem," Miss Guffles proceeded grimly, "'the true angular distances between the centres of the moon and sun, a fixed star or planet, are set down in pages . . . Nautical Almanac'—Got that, Lucy ?"

Lucy acknowledged the remark by patting the blue covers of the book as though she were caressing a puppy—"Nicee, nicee sing," she whispered.

"For the beginning of every third hour of Greenwich mean time' . . . um ! . . . er . . . yes, 'compared with the mean time at the ship, their difference will be the *longitude of the place of observation*.' Exactly. I see. Yes.

"But since the observed distance is always taken from the surface of the earth——"

"Let's go down into the middle," said Helen with a grunt of weariness. "Do, do something."

"Coming to it . . . now. See, 'parallax and refraction, the moon is seen lower than its true place' . . . er . . . um ! . . . Yes, 'hence, the true is almost always different from the observed distance.' Of course it is. How could it be otherwise? Ah ! now we are getting to it——"

"So glad," murmured Helen.

"Deevie," said Miss Patterson, "I wonder if I might have ickle cupee tea?"

Miss Guffles faced about, and her pince-nez dropped with a click at her waist. "Lucy !" she cried severely, "if you insist on making yourself disagreeable, I shall have to report."

"Dear old Syd !" said the imperturbable Lucy, and dear old Syd had to turn away.

She adjusted her glasses and proceeded—

"In taking a lunar observation, two assistants should be employed to observe the altitudes of the objects while the principal observer is taking their distance"—Helen, remember you are on the moon ; Lilian, you have the sun, and I take the angular distance. Now, I think that is quite plain. We just take the altitudes and angular distances, and call out to Lucy to take the time, and then we come in to work it out . . . Oh ! wait a minute—here is what I was looking for—I knew it was *somewhere*. 'Let the observations be taken in the following order, noting the times by a watch : one, the altitude of the sun, star, or planet ; two, the altitude of the moon ; three, any *odd* number of distances,' that's what I had forgotten—*odd* . . . 'four, the altitude of the moon ; five, the altitude of the sun, star, or planet. Now add together' . . . yes . . . um—m—m ! 'and get the mean . . . which, added to, or subtracted from, the first altitude, according as it is increasing or decreasing——'"

"Oh, I say, Syd ! How are we to remember all that ?" cried Helen in despair.

"You need not. I will," Miss Guffles announced. "You have to take the sun."

"Moon," Helen corrected.

"All right," said Miss Guffles with a little shrug of annoyance. She fluttered a page or two and went on—

"To find the true distance,' ah ! that was what I

wanted . . . um—m—m ! . . . Rule (1) To the sum of the apparent altitudes, add the difference of the correction of the moon's apparent altitude and that of the star, sun, or planet which will give the sum' . . . yes . . . 'subtract from 180° , and that will equal the sum of true zenith distance' . . . yes, yes. . . . Auxiliary arc and apparent distance, call these ABC,' hum—m ! . . . um—m ! . . . 'Four, add together,' ah, this is it, 'the natural versed sines of the five arcs.' Got that ? "

"Thought you said three—ABC," said Lilian Roberts with a sigh. "Sydney, I don't believe you remember a bit."

"Don't bother," said Miss Guffles, "but jot it down."

"Tell the quartermaster to bring me a wet towel," said Helen.

"Spec he'll have a conscientious subjection, dear," said Miss Lucy with a delightful intonation.

They all laughed. It was impossible to refuse Lucy's nonsense. Then Miss Guffles' voice rang out again, her pencil moving rapidly, in jerks.

" 'To the log co-sine of the half sum and difference add the logarithmic difference, and half the sum of these logarithms will be the log sine of an arch.' Got that ? "

"Log sine of an arch," Lilian the precise announced as she wrote.

"Log sine of a . . . " yawned Helen.

"Gee-gee," said Miss Patterson. "I wish I could see his nose."

"Oh, Lucy, this is absurd ! " quoth Miss Guffles, looking round in despair.

"Not my fault . . . will come," said Lucy, "can't stop it—can't—can't. There, let me read," and she seized the book and began in her quaint, clipped speech—

" 'Add togezzer the log co-sines of sum and diffee of arch, and half the sum of real twue alties—then will half the sum of these twee logims be the log sine of half the twue disse—'"

Helen Granger dropped her note-book and sat back on the sofa with a peal of laughter. "Oh ! this is too—too—too . . . " she gasped.

"Poor ickle sing ! " said Lucy gravely. "Did ums have stericks ? " She came across and began to fan with the book, a heavy volume, but Miss Guffles interfered.

"Lucy! go to your room at once," she ordered.

"So glad!" said Miss Lucy, but she did not move. She continued to fan, and Helen laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Go at once!" said Miss Guffles. "You are suspended."

Lucy glanced up with an entrancing smile. "Spended?" she repeated. "Can't be—don't wear them." She seated herself beside Helen and put one arm about her waist, while with her disengaged hand she held open the book.

"Listen to this," she said, with imperturbable gravity. "Find the twee dissies between which the twee disse falls on the gieve day, and take out the inti'medite prop log from the column headee P L of diff, 'tract this prop log from the prop log to the diffie 'tween the twee disse and that unner next less hour. . . . Oh! my poor, poor tweet—what is it?"

Helen Granger leaned forward and fell upon Lucy's neck, laughing—laughing—crying, shaking the chart-room, for Miss Guffles, in the stern dignity of slighted authority, had gone to the bridge to make her report, and Lilian Roberts was standing against the desk, uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

"I have to report," said Miss Guffles, with a martinet-like salute, "that Lucy Patterson is——"

"Oh, never mind reports. Have you the longitude?" Violet questioned.

"No; we are just——"

"Quartermaster!" cried Miss Ramsden, "call Captain Carragh." She turned to poor, flustered Miss Guffles, and went on, "It's nearly eight o'clock, Syd, and we are going goodness knows where. Do go and stop those girls laughing."

"Can't," said Miss Guffles. "It's hysterics."

She passed across the bridge, and was about to leave it, when Carragh appeared, and Violet hastened to meet him to explain the position.

"You see," she concluded, "there is nothing I can suggest; and I think it better to give over the control in future entirely to you and your officers. Don't you think that will be——"

Miss Guffles turned about at once.

"I think there is no occasion for panic, Violet. I can

set the chronometers if you will allow me time. It is possible, isn't it, Captain Carragh ? ”

Carragh looked up quickly.

“ Well, yes ; there are one or two ways. Which do you suggest ? ”

“ Lunars,” said Miss Guffles.

“ Oh, but you can't take them.”

“ Pardon, Captain Carragh ; I don't see why not. I have often worked them.”

“ I don't doubt that—but——”

“ And it would have been done by this time only for Lucy Patterson's silly behaviour——”

“ Yes : but you can't take lunars to-day, Miss Guffles,” said Carragh, “ because, you see, there doesn't happen to be any moon.”

Miss Guffles stared. She began to speak, then turned away and hurried to her room.

On the bridge people laughed till the tears came. In the second officer's room a lady sat silent—until the tears came.

It was inexpressibly sad.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAN WITH THE NUBBLY BROW

THE lunars completed what Harrison and Falmouth had commenced. Lady Barraclough decided to call her friends together, and a meeting was arranged in the place of lavender and frills. At eight o'clock the women were all present, and Lady Barraclough crossed the room and took the chair.

Miss Guffles at once rose and said—

"I must ask the indulgence of the committee on a personal matter which I think requires some explanation," and having reached this point, Miss Guffles paused, and then hurriedly resumed, "I fear I have put every one in a very uncomfortable position. I regret it extremely, for it was perhaps more my fault than any one else's that we came this voyage——"

"No, no," said Lady Barraclough. "I think we all wished to come."

"Nevertheless," Miss Guffles decided, "it was because of my yacht, and I did so want to be able to navigate her myself and hold a proper certificate. But whatever happens now, I take the whole blame. Of course it was forgetfulness. I never can remember little details, for, you see, my maid does them for me, and on my yacht, of course, the captain is always there to remind me—and so you see . . . Oh! it's horrid. I don't know what we are going to do—for if we can't take lunars, we can't correct the chronometers, and if we have no chronometers, how can we go on?"

Little Lady Jane rose in her place, and staring through her gold-rimmed spectacles, said, "May I ask, what is a lunar?"

Lady Barraclough, in her capacity as chairman, should have answered, but as she was not quite sure, she paused, considering. Lucy Patterson called out—

“Diskie ’vations.”

“What?”

“Diskie ’vations of the moon. Sings ’vented to make lunatics.”

“Oh!” said Lady Jane.

“In plain English,” Miss Guffles interjected, with an intonation that should have annihilated Lucy, “they are observations taken of the moon and sun or a planet to——”

“Yes. We know—but it’s ’tremie stupid,” Lucy announced.

Miss Guffles took no notice. She resumed, “At all events, it is my fault, and I feel more vexed than I can say——”

“I think we are all to blame, more or less,” Miss Ramsden remarked, as her friend paused, faltering. “The night I took charge I decided we had made a mistake, and what has occurred since has only served to strengthen that opinion. You remember the red flares we met that night off Dungeness, and all the fishing-boats we had to pass? Well, I nearly sank a fishing-smack then, and it was not until we reached Falmouth that I was able to do anything to recompense the captain. Of course, Captain Carragh told me what to do, and how—I only mention it now, Syd, because I want you not to take it to heart too much, having forgotten the chronometers. Captain Carragh tells me——”

“Captain Carragh!” Sydney Guffles accentuated. “It is always Captain Carragh. Can’t we manage a moment without him?”

“Apparently not,” said Violet.

“Then I vote we go home.”

“Oh, but that must be unnecessary,” cried Lady Jane; “and you surely are forgetting about all those tulips we have for the kingdom of Ulanda . . . and the petticoats—and everything we came to do.”

“No, I am not forgetting,” said Miss Guffles.

“But, my dear, my dear,” quiet little Lady Jane expostulated, “surely you would not have us throw away all our goods and money and everything, just

because the chronometers—I don't know what they have to do with it—but because they have been forgotten."

"I do," said Miss Guffles.

"And I agree," Miss Roberts decided. "We had better return."

"Navigation was what we came to practise," Miss Guffles asserted; "the other things were only incidental."

"Incidental! Well!" came from Lady Jane's pursed lips, as she stared in amazement.

"I think," Lady Barraclough remarked, as the pause lengthened out, "I think, perhaps, Guffles means—supplementary."

"Of course," said Miss Guffles, with her board-room air, "if incidental is in any way offensive, I withdraw it, unconditionally."

"Thank you," Lady Jane remarked, placidly rubbing her spectacles. "I look forward to seeing Alicia Jason distributing those petticoats; and as for the tulips—why, Schopenhauer tells me emphatically that we have not the remotest notion of how they will develop given the right conditions. And I think you will remember that the R.S.P.T. decided that the conditions approaching nearest to perfection are to be found in the kingdom of Ulanda. Why, my dear, I have spent a thousand pounds on the idea, and I am prepared to spend more. The colouring of this marvellous species has been a source of wonder to all who have studied it *as it is*, but imagine what will be the result if we find more suitable climatic conditions. I vote for a prosecution of the voyage."

"I also vote for a prosecution of the voyage," came from Miss Jason, with all the force of her powerful voice. "It is essential. If it had not been essential I should not have started."

"Of course," said Miss Guffles, "if you wish to move an——"

"Oh! don't be so beastly proper!"

A new voice came out with these words, and every one was astonished to see Elsie Collins, the fifth officer, standing in her place with a flush on her pretty face that only served to accentuate her beauty. This young lady rarely troubled to interrupt any one; she was content to

take life as it came, and was not a whit interested in programmes and brooms. But there she stood flushing and speaking quite determinedly.

"I think," she hurried on, "it's all rot to act as though we were a stupid set of county councillors. What is the use of all this talkee, talkee? If you want to do something, why doesn't some one say so without pretending we are boards and committees and deputations? We are only copying the silliest type there is—the verbose company promoters we elect to do our shouting. I vote for common sense and less talk. If we go on as we appear to be going, we may as well adapt all the habits and idiosyncrasies of these men we pretend to hate—get bald-headed, take whisky-pegs, and all the rest of it.

"Now the point is this. Some of us wish to continue and some of us wish to go back; very well, let us see which party is stronger, and let those who are defeated abide by the decision of the majority."

"Majorities are always tyrannical," said Miss Guffles.

"And minorities make most noise," Elsie retorted, smiling. "Of course," she went on, "I have no idea which side I belong to yet—so there is nothing personal in the observation."

Lady Barracrough looked at Miss Guffles and said in her new intonation—

"I understand, dear, you wish to make some suggestion; if you will tell me what it is, I will put it to the meeting."

"I think," said Miss Guffles, "that in view of what has happened, it will be better for us to return home, and I desire to submit the question."

"Very well—will any one second it?"

"I do," cried Miss Roberts.

"Thank you. Then I put it. Those in favour of returning will signify in the usual way."

Two hands were held up.

"Two, for," Lady Barracrough announced. "Against."

"Three, four, six, seven, eight! My dear, the meeting is all but unanimous in its intention to continue."

"Then I have nothing more to urge," Miss Roberts decided.

Lady Barracrough leaned forward in her chair and scanned the agenda paper lying on the table. "And

now," she said, "there comes the question of procedure, and, as I have had some talk on the subject with Captain Carragh, I think perhaps it will be as well if I put the various suggestions before you.

"We are confronted with the fact that it is impossible to set our chronometers here, and must, in consequence, decide which of several plans we must adopt. First, it is suggested that we return to Falmouth; second, that we take what I am told are 'cross-bearings' off Ushant; third, that we continue still farther and go into harbour at Brest—or again, return to Plymouth and obtain new instruments."

"Why new instruments?" questioned Miss Roberts.

"Because, my dear, I am told it will be impossible to rely on chronometers which have run down and been reset, until they have been tested for what Captain Carragh calls 'rate.' But perhaps you would like to hear what he has to say on the subject, for there are many technical points which I confess I do not understand, that he might be able to explain."

"I don't think it is necessary to trouble Captain Carragh," Miss Guffles remarked in cutting tones; "he will be certain to make the most of the incident in order to crow over us."

Violet Ramsden looked up at this and said distinctly that she did not consider that a fair remark, and asked for its withdrawal.

"Of course, if you wish it, Violet, I withdraw," said Miss Guffles.

"I do wish it," came from Miss Violet's curved lips. "I think it quite unwarranted."

"I, too, consider it rather unnecessary," Lady Barraclough agreed.

"Oh, if you are all on Captain Carragh's side, I withdraw. I have no option."

"Very well—now which is it to be, girls," Lady Barraclough hurried on with the expressed determination of avoiding topics so likely to produce discord, "Plymouth or Brest? for I think I am within my right in ruling the other two out of court on the ground, as far as Falmouth is concerned, of undesirability; and the other, because I am told it could only be a makeshift. So I put the question—Plymouth or Brest? Those in favour of Plymouth

hold up their hands . . . one, two, three, four. Four. Now Brest." Again four hands were held up, and Lady Barraclough, in her capacity of chairman, gave the casting vote in favour of the French port.

"I make a further suggestion," Violet Ramsden intervened suddenly. "I propose that we leave the whole matter entirely in Captain Carragh's hands, and the reasons I have for making it are these. We cannot expect to do these things as well as men because we are not strong enough, because we wear petticoats, and because we lack initiative. To continue as we are is, to my mind, absurd. I therefore intend to resign. I shall hand the whole——"

How far Miss Ramsden intended to proceed at this moment was never known, for, as she reached this point, a loud knock fell on the door and a steward entered looking very scared.

"If you please, me lady," he said, "there's a lot of the men in the halleyway, an' they threatened to put a head on me if I didn't come——"

"A head?" Lady Barraclough questioned, lifting her starers.

The man quailed. "Punch me, my lady," he said.

"Oh!" said Lady Barraclough with an inscrutable smile, "but I have no wish to punch you."

The man grinned. "No, but they have," he said, "and they want to see the lady captain, my lady . . . and they're——"

Violet Ramsden rose from her chair and said—

"Very well, I will come. Where are they?"

"I don't think you ought," Miss Guffles exclaimed. "It isn't safe."

"Nonsense, dear. They won't hurt me. It is another deputation, I expect—nothing to be alarmed about. Pray allow me to take my own course."

She moved from the place of lavender and frills, and, following the steward, came into the alleyway. Fronting her were a group of the pudding-shaped sailors, and standing a trifle in advance was the man with the nubby brow. He held a tin pot in his hand. Steam rose from it, and as Violet Ramsden approached he doffed his cap and stood before her bareheaded.

"My lady—leastways, miss, which is sir," he remarked,

then paused and drew his hand across his mouth. "I ast you," he went on, "wevver that's cawfee, or wevver it's burnt biscuit, or wevver it's cockroaches—an' likewise, wotever it may be, wevver it's fit drink for chaps uz 'ave bin on watch eight hours. Man to man I hask it—least-ways, man to miss."

He advanced a step, holding forth a little tin pot, and Violet, struggling hard to look grave, essayed a sniff.

"What is it supposed to be?" she questioned, the dimples showing plainly in her cheeks.

"Cawfee."

"Is it what you have for breakfast?"

"Just that an' nuffin' else, miss. Taste it—it's our cawfee. Port watch, after height hours out."

Miss Ramsden shook her head. "No," she smiled, "I would rather not—it looks like ink . . . and what *are* those things floating at the top?"

"Cockroaches," said the man with the nubbly brow, with a proud glance at his shipmates standing capless behind.

"Disgusting!" said Miss Ramsden.

The man with the nubbly brow turned to his friends. "Mates," he cried, "she says it's disgustin'. That's a true bill—wot'll we do wiv it?"

"Pour it down the cook's froat," said one.

"Chief stew'id, y'mean!" said another.

"Purser likewise—give 'em all three a bath in it," urged a third. They shuffled on the deck and appeared so intent on redressing their wrongs at once, that Violet sprang forward.

"Oh, but you won't do that. There's some mistake. There must be some mistake."

"Yes," said he of the nubbly brow, "a mistake as ockurs every bloomin' mornin', beggin' your pardin for the word; an' if you was a gentleman skipper, an' not a lady, miss, it ud a bin poured down your neck afore this—sure."

Violet Ramsden drew back a pace, the dimples had vanished.

"I will see that it doesn't happen again," she said, "but you must not talk about reprisals—for that is mutiny."

"Mutiny?" said the man, his brow working. "An' isn't it enough to breed mutiny? I hask it plain. You

tell us you've took us in charge, body an' soul, an' you're hawnserable for all an' sundry hunder the King's grant . . . an' this 'ere Lady Barracouta, she spins us a long yarn about the rights o' man an' the beauties o' conscience—an' ere we hare, give cockroach cawfee for breakfast an' claggy duff for dinner, an' . . . well, look at this, miss—ain't it enough to make a chap jump up an' swear he'll never come down again. Look!" He patted his absurd guernsey with one hand and the sound of a banged drum set the dimples at work again in Violet's face. She leaned forward—

"What is it?" she asked.

"Patent wes'c't—hot as hot, an' we don't dare leave 'em off—an' wot it'll be in the trawpics, Lord alone knows."

"Waistcoats? What for?"

"Lifebelts, miss—leastways, sir," said a chorus of voices.

The man with the nubby brow turned round. "Ain't I doin' wot you want?" he questioned truculently. "Right. Then you leave hawnsers to me. I'm yer spokeslave, an' if I'm to be yer spokeslave I want fair play—see?"

As no one made any reply to this, the man with the nubby brow drew his hand across his mouth and referred to his notes. "Oh, wes'c'ts," he said with a sudden accession of gravity. "Well sir, an' awskin' your pardon fer the liberty, wot about these 'ere indiarubber fakements?"

Violet Ramsden presumed he meant the waistcoats; she was not certain, but his speech seemed to point in that direction, so she said, "Why do you wear them if they are so unpleasant?"

"Becawse," said the man with the nubby brow, "becawse the Company served 'em hout—miss, which is sir."

"But is that usual? . . . Don't they always serve them out—or is it because we——"

The man looked up with a puckered brow.

"That's it, miss . . . becawse of the 'culiar conditions. Lady officers, lady captin'—why, we don't know where we har—in a manner o' speakin'—wevver we'll turn out on to the fo'k'sle deck or into a froggin' match——"

"Frogging?" said Miss Ramsden with calm insistence, despite the absurdity which would not keep out of sight.

"Sir," said the man with the nubbly brow, with intense solemnity, "it's no use mincing matters. We wear these yer wes'c'ts becawse we dusn't leave 'em hoff. Ships get into collision quick enough in or'nary times, but wiv lady skippers as cut up fishermen's nets an' never so much as say 'By your leave' or 'Go to the——'" He paused, visibly embarrassed, and wiping his mouth said, "Beg pardin, we won't mention 'im, seein' it's you—an' then forgets about the crenometers an' leaves hus sailin' around like a fly in a jug of beer . . . well, I put it to you, miss, which is sir—is it fair doos, an' can you egspect us to doff 'em, seeing things is wot they har, an' any minute may see us takin' to the water like young ducks to a bed o' hot cinders——"

Miss Ramsden held up her hand, begging for silence.

"One minute," she cried. "Will you tell me when these . . . these waistcoats were served out?"

"The night we stawted, miss—which is sir, an' beggin' your pardin for the mistake, which is nat'ral considerin' you're a lady an' not——"

"Oh! never mind; never mind apologising," cried Miss Ramsden, "but tell me . . . who served them out?"

"Captain Carragh, miss."

"Are you sure—sure?"

"Miss," said the man with the nubbly brow, "do hi look like a chap uz tells lies?"

He spread out his hands standing at attention, and Violet glanced up at the absurd figure so visibly padded about the guernsey, so visibly serious and perspiring of face, and laughter possessed her. "No," she cried, "you only look—funny . . . too funny for words. Oh, please go away . . . and," a sudden chill seized her, and she resumed in quicker tones, "and—oh yes, I will give orders about the . . . coffee and the chronometers . . . and the . . . w-w-waistcoats . . . only please to go away and don't bother, for——" she paused on the edge of tears, and the man with the nubbly brow turned round upon his companions.

"Clear hout!" he shouted. "It's all hunky-boy . . . an', miss," he added, viewing the trembling lips with noticeable apprehension, "we rely on your words."

He stooped and picked up the pot of coffee, and, preceded by the pudding-like effigies, marched down the

alleyway and came down to the door of his house. Here they paused, and the spokeslave said, "Mates, we can't do no more. If they was in charge an' they 'ad no orficers be'ind 'em, we might work a very neat little go out of it ; but there *is* orficers behind—an' the gells an' them are just one. Same sect, same talk—law-di-daw—toffs, all the lot of 'em. Sickenin' I call it."

But Miss Ramsden, left alone, stood some moments gazing at the tumbling foam streak. It drew faces for her, eyes, a laughing mouth. Turn where she would she only saw Carragh standing there to mock her, to jeer at her difficulties—for, had he not served out those abominable waistcoats which had made her and her friends a laughingstock ? It was mean. She could find no excuse—not one.

With a sudden accession of dignity she moved from the rail and climbed the saloon stairs. In the place of lavender and frills her friends still debated the question of procedure. The drone of their voices came out to her as she crept up to the promenade. She desired a moment's solitude, a moment for consideration, and there, as fate would have it in that small ship world, Carragh sat in his chair, reading. He rose as she came down the deck and crossed to meet her, carrying his book.

"You look worried," he said anxiously. "Pray don't think of it."

It was as though he had divined her thoughts and sought to palliate his offence ; but she knew quite well he alluded to the idiotic chronometer *fiasco*—and knowing it, glanced up to say—

"I am tired. I am also annoyed. It seems that the cook, or the steward, or somebody who should know better, has given the men disgraceful stuff for coffee. I have just seen a deputation, and it is abominable." Her voice rang out clearly. There was no mistaking the intonation. Miss Violet Ramsden was annoyed with Captain Carragh, and had forgotten all about the Paddy of the *Rajah* days.

"Do I understand," he said with a swift indrawing and change of tone, "that the men have ventured to trouble *you* about their coffee ?"

"Precisely. You see I am their commander."

"Were they rude—were they impertinent in any way, Miss Ramsden ?" Carragh went on swiftly. "Why did you

not send for me? I would have arranged it quite simply. Believe me, it is some beastly carelessness—nothing more—and I think you might have asked me to——”

“Do you?” came the clear young voice, without a thrill, without a smile. “I did not know you were so anxious to smooth matters for me. If I had known, of course——”

A pause. Then Carragh’s deeper tones—

“I am more sorry than I can say, Miss Ramsden. I will see to it at once.”

“No—pray don’t. I have arranged it.”

“Is that a wish, or a command?”

“Either should be sufficient, Captain Carragh.”

Carragh bowed.

“And, as I am arranging to give up control,” the clear young voice went on more quickly, “I will ask you to forget that I mentioned it, but to give orders, even if you have to supplement the ship’s stores at our expense, that the men have adequate and decently-cooked food.”

“Very well. I will see that your orders are carried out. . . . When do you propose to give up control?”

“I will send word. We are deciding it now—in the drawing-room.”

She turned at once, and, retracing her steps, came to the place of lavender and frills. But her face, as she entered, was as white as the foam she had watched.

Carragh crossed to his chair and sat down, but his book remained unread, and in his eyes was a puzzled frown.

CHAPTER XXI

SADIE COLE INTERVENES

THE message arrived in due course at the hands of Sadie Cole. It was short and to the point, as Carragh felt it would be, but, now it had come, he stared at the writing with a curious irritation. It was Lady Barraclough who had sent the note.

"DEAR CAPTAIN CARRAGH,—I am asked by Miss Ramsden to acquaint you with our decision on a matter upon which I gather you have already had some conversation. You will, therefore, not be unprepared for what follows. My friends, of whom Miss Ramsden is the chief, desire me to say they wish to be relieved of any further responsibility in navigating the ship ; indeed, they will be glad if you will arrange to take charge as soon as convenient.

"We have also decided to put ourselves in your hands, and to give you *carte-blanche* as to the chronometers.

"Yours truly,

\ "HONORIA BARRACLOUGH."

"Well," said Sadie Cole as Carragh looked up from reading, "what are you going to do?"

"As this, presumably, is a private letter, Mrs. Cole, perhaps I ought to write a reply."

"High horse! Thought so," was Mrs. Cole's comment. "Well, I don't blame you. We've tied ourselves up in a good old knot, and handed you the bunch to unravel. Womanlike—eh, Captain Carragh?"

Carragh made no reply. He walked to and fro the deck with a frown that appeared immovable.

"Why don't you swear?" said Mrs. Cole with a quick glance. "Never mind me; I'm used to it—another thing, by the way, for which I have to thank my husband."

Carragh halted and came near.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I feel like a bear just now."

"That's bad," Mrs. Cole conceded. "There's every excuse for a man who feels like that, and I forgive you—provided you don't start in hugging me."

"I could hug any one at this minute," Carragh announced grimly.

"Hug a cigarette, then."

She held out her dainty jewelled case, and Carragh accepted the situation with a laugh. "I will," he replied, "if you will also."

"Why certainly," said Mrs. Cole; then they lighted from the same match, and the vivacious lady chief sank into a comfortable chair facing seaward. Carragh seemed absorbed in the beauty of the radiant blue depths shimmering in the eye of the sun. Mrs. Cole watched intently her companion's face, and the group of islands lying, like a distant town, lifting roofs and spires through the haze.

"I am wondering," she said at length, "what you intend to do?"

Carragh came back from his reverie with a start—

"Oh, go in, of course."

"Brest?"

"Yes—it is the only rational course."

"I suppose it is. . . . And when do you take charge?"

"At once—you think so too?"

"Strike the iron while it's hot, captain. Certainly. Most of us are very sick of navigation, for you see we don't cotton to problems that are all figures and no dress—while, as far as I am concerned——" She paused, smiling and watching him from under drowsy lids.

"Yes," he said, unmoved, "as far as you are concerned?"

"Well, I never made any attempt to conceal my views. I think the most entrancing study for a woman is man."

"And, conversely," said Carragh without a tremor, "the most entrancing study for a man is woman."

"Precisely," Mrs. Cole acquiesced; "or, as that philo-

sopher of yours discovered, sex is a paradox—it only separates in order that it may unite.”¹

“I wonder, now,” she went on, as Carragh blew clouds very quickly from his cigarette, and kept a straight face during the waste—“I wonder whether my friend the earl would care to join us?”

“There are several, of course,” Carragh conceded with a fine disregard of the ground he trod on, “but it’s a long way to bring him—over there.” He nodded towards the distant French coast.

“And chronometers could be obtained as cheaply at—Plymouth, for instance?”

“Both cheaper and better, Mrs. Cole.”

“And we should be fostering British industries instead of French?”

“Quite so. It would be more patriotic, when you think of it.”

Mrs. Cole blew smoke gently through rounded lips, and said, “I feel awfully patriotic, Captain Carragh.”

“So do I,” Carragh announced. “Yes, we can make it Plymouth.”

“Possible?” she questioned, smiling.

“Of course it is. We have no chronometers; but we have a good departure, and the weather is fine. I will risk it.”

He found his whistle, and gave the quartermaster’s signal—two sharp sounds; and a moment later the man with the conscientious objection to calling female skippers stood before them saluting.

“Tell the chief and second officers I wish to see them,” said the captain.

The quartermaster moved away at once, and Sadie Cole glanced up with a smile.

“That is awfully sweet of you,” she cried. “I did so long for Plymouth. Why, we might even stay there a week, I suppose?”

“And save the cost of new chronometers,” Carragh admitted.

“Charming. . . . Oh, but about British industries?” she questioned, with a serious expression that made her even more piquant than before.

“I don’t know,” said Carragh, “but what British

¹ Drummond.

industries are very well able to take care of themselves—eh, Mrs. Cole ? ”

“ Sure they can.”

The two officers approached, and Carragh turned to them.

“ Walton,” he said, “ we take charge at once. Kindly give instructions as to setting watches, &c., and, Lovatt, take cross-bearings of Ushant yonder, and get her round on her course for Plymouth. Let me know, too, when we can reach, say, at seventeen knots.”

The two men saluted, and moved away to give the necessary orders, and five minutes later the *Southern Cross* swept round on her helm, and headed once more to the northward.

Sadie Cole rose from her chair, and laid her hand on Carragh’s arm.

“ I like the cool way you men take things,” she said. “ Why, if I had made such a suggestion down there, we should have had dissertations and resolutions and amendments galore ; but you just look at it without speaking, and say, ‘ Do this, do that,’ and it is done. Oh ! we aren’t in it at command.”

“ We have been practising all our lives, Mrs. Cole ; there is nothing superhuman in it. A man should be able to pack up and start for the other end of the world in ten minutes.”

“ Yes ; and we require a week to consider about the hang of a frill. . . . Ah me ! I must see about my earl. By the way, though, do you think he can ever love me ? ”

“ I’m sure he will—er—he couldn’t help it, Mrs. Cole.”

“ That is sweet of you,” she flashed. “ Oh ! but I despair—I despair. . . . Mrs. Cole—after all I have done too ! ”

“ I’m Scotch,” he pleaded, “ horribly, incurably Scotch ; all the Irishman is dead in me.”

“ Then we’ll have to get it revived. . . . Say, though, talking of revivifying, did you see Violet Ramsden just now ? ”

Carragh’s eyes assumed a new expression. “ Yes,” he replied, “ before you came up.”

“ Ah ! then that accounts for it,” Mrs. Cole announced dolefully, noting the change.

Carragh had taken up his glasses and was examining

the horizon, but there seemed to be a vacant space just there ; at least, the girl thought it was vacant as she followed his gaze.

"Accounts for what ?" he questioned, still staring.

"For what I saw," Sadie Cole led.

"Oh ! what was that ?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Cole with a snap.

Carragh shut his binoculars and turned about. "Cape Flyaway," he remarked, in extenuation of his search. "I might have known it."

Sadie Cole gathered her skirts with that dainty and *negligé* air which belongs to the born manager of trains. Some women lift a dress with utter disregard of consequences ; others carry it as an old-time milkman carried his cans ; others bunch it ; others, again, swathe themselves, and one is left wondering how they contrive to move ; but with Sadie Cole one recognised a little flutter of silks, a vision of lace, a twinkle, a rustle, a shake, and the thing lay around her in lines an artist might envy. She paused a moment, half-turned to move away, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing.

"Say," she whispered, "don't you get resigning or doing anything you'll be sorry for. Stick on—it will pan out all right—you see," and with a merry wave of the hand Mrs. Cole passed down the promenade to her room.

Carragh remained quite still, his thoughts racing none too soberly about the episodes of the past few days. He asked himself what he had done to merit the frigid attitude Violet Ramsden had displayed. He could call to mind nothing, absolutely nothing, unless by chance she had noticed what it was evident Sadie Cole had noticed, that he loved her. Yet, was that sufficient reason ? His thoughts flew back to the *Rajah* days, when he had looked into her face and she had met his gaze with a little flush of pleasure, as though it were possible, just possible, she might . . . Pish ! What had brought about the change ? when had it first been noticeable ? who else had seen it ? There was no answer. He could find no reason, and his mind fell back upon the paltry fact of his position—a commander in the Merchant Service, a man at the beck and call of a board of directors, who, did he make the smallest mistake, would pass him over and leave him to fight or die as he willed.

Sadie Cole's parting words came back to trouble him. Resign? He wished it were possible—but it was not possible now. Gad! if any one had made a fool of himself, he was that personage; if any one had made himself a laughingstock, he was that man. Nothing could palliate it, nothing could blot it from his remembrance. He had played the fool. With his eyes open he had accepted a position in which friction was bound to appear. With his eyes open he had consented to . . . but there was an excuse. Violet Ramsden, Paddy, the *Rajah* days; days long sunk, long dreamed of, and now falling back to the dead level of commonplace, they were the excuse, and yet—and yet——

He turned to replace his binoculars with a sudden determination to shake clear of the whole business, and discovered Peter Lovatt approaching with a small white card.

"Course and distance to Eddystone, sir, is N. 45° E. (true), 110 miles," said that spruce young gentleman. "Seventeen knots," he added, "puts us in at 4.45 p.m., without allowing for stoppages."

Carragh came back to the affairs of a steamship rushing over a sunlit sea without chronometers, at the whim of a beautiful woman who apparently desired to aid him.

"Thank you," he said. "Give the chief engineer my compliments, and ask him to make that speed."

But he spoke to the navigating officer, Peter Lovatt.

CHAPTER XXII

RESIGNATION

AT 4 p.m., as they swept past Eddystone, the bo'sun and his two mates came down the deck trilling their whistles, and the watch tumbled up for relief.

"Muster! All hands!" cried the man with the silver call in a deep, growling shout. The crew fell into line—petty officers, sailors, firemen, stewards—each watch on its own side, and the names were called. A buzz of sound broken by various intonations of the word "Here" ensued, then the two mates reported, and their chief moved towards the bridge ladder, crying out, "Inspection—promenade!"

He dangled his arm, watching the groups as they formed again, and when all were at attention he approached the chief officer with a salute and announced—

"Hall present, sir."

The chief informed the commander, and then, accompanied by the doctor and purser, made the rounds. They passed down the long double line, and returning, halted at the head of it. Carragh stepped forward and said—

"Petty officers and men of the *Southern Cross*, at Lady Barraclough's desire, I resume control of the ship. You will therefore understand that in future all orders that are given will emanate from me, and you will obey smartly."

A low murmur of approval ran down the lines, but Carragh checked it and proceeded—

"I am also asked to say that Lady Barraclough wishes to mark her sense of gratitude to you all for your conduct the other night, and, with this object in view, requests the pleasure of your company at dinner to-night at eight o'clock in the saloon.

"Bo'sun, pipe down."

Again the pipes rose shrilly, accentuating the order, and as the men passed to their quarters each of them carried off a formal invitation, which they received from the hands of two junior officers standing at the head of the ladder. They moved away revolving the matter in silence.

The man with the nubbly brow came down and stood with a group of his pals in the forecastle. He looked annoyed, even anxious ; but it was noticeable both now and during inspection that he and his shipmates had assumed the normal dimensions of sailor-men about the guernsey. Still, he did not speak, and this, in view of his acknowledged position as sea lawyer, brought the others about him clamouring.

"Well, wot's it goin' to be? Are we goin', or are we not; are we to stow 'er macaroni or are we goin' to chuck it?"

The man with the nubbly brow looked in his bunk for a nail. "Goin'?" he questioned; "a course we are. W'y not?"

"Seems up against your teachin', any way," one suggested.

"Teachin's hoff," said he of the nubbly brow, "likewise programmes an' the King's grant. Heggst the women, henter the men. We'll sleep now; an'," he added thoughtfully, "it ought to be a skinful, any way."

He referred neither to the women nor sleep, but to the probability of growing fat at dinner. He found a hammer, and turning put a nail through his card and tacked it to the side of his bunk.

"That cooks it," he said.

In the quartermaster's room a chilly silence reigned. The two men off duty had nothing to say why they should not share in the bounties of the feast, but a recollection of the necessity for quicker movement dawned in the mind of each.

One pinned his invitation to the red curtain of his bunk, the other found a little frame and inserted it in the place of the brazen damsel in tights who had hitherto stared at him while he took rest.

They stood back to see the effect, then lighted their pipes, and one said in a tone of dreary acquiescence—

"Eight o'clock. Three howers yet. Lord! how the time do crawl!"

The bo'sun and carpenter summoned their boy and gave him minute instructions as to their kit.

"Put me hout a clean-boiled rag," said he of the silver whistle, "an' see it's got no fringe on the cuffs."

"Me likewise," said Chips, who was a Swede, and knew more about rivets and pump gear than shavings and sawdust.

"An' put me hout my number one sweet freezer¹ an' wite bags. Full fig—savvy?" the bo'sun added, with dignity.

The boy savvied.

"Me likewise," said Chips. "An' ven you into mine shirt ze studs place, look you no plack ze frondt mit your file handts—soh?"

The boy sohed.

"An' now fetch my tea," said the bo'sun.

"Mine alzo," Chips repeated; "an' fetch vor me a vine cart, ven you gomes along."

"Ha!" said the bo'sun, with sudden energy, "a good hidea. We'll drink to 'em."

"Ve vill," said Chips.

"After all," the bo'sun resumed, "there's some use in petticoats."

"Zere is," Chips acknowledged, as he rolled his head, laboriously signing the wine card. "It dakes you all your dime, at sea, to hold zem down. . . . Poy, pring do me dwo gogdails."

At 5.30 p.m., in the smoking-room, a steward passed amidst the round-topped tables carrying a tray laden with small tumblers.

"Captain's compliments, sir," he remarked, as he paused before each officer in turn.

The officers accepted their fate with resignation.

"Jam cocktails," said Peter Lovatt, smacking his lips.

"Well, it will start me comfortably with my babies."

Five minutes later, with the "babies tucked carefully

¹ Shell jacket.

in their cradles," he was on his way to get "them doctored."

At least, that is how he spoke of the chronometers and the incident which rendered medical advice necessary ; but Lady Barraclough took a much more serious view, and, as the tender left the ship's side, she turned to her friend with—

"Exit the evidence of our incompetence."

Miss Ramsden smiled at the lashing phrase.

"I am rather glad it happened," she replied.

CHAPTER XXIII

LADY BARRACLOUGH'S REPORT

"Yacht *Southern Cross*,
"Approaching Plymouth.

"MY DEAR STAFFERLY,—I fancy I see your smile as you read the above sentence, but I know you too well to imagine there will be anything of triumph in it ; although—as a preface to what will prove my last word on this subject—I admit the end is at hand. Think of it—the end !

"It is only two days since we left Falmouth, hiding our ears from the clamour we had not willingly raised, and crowing loudly of what we would do to sink the recollection. We decided we would make for Teneriffe, examine it, discover if there were any truth in the stories of cruelty to animals which so constantly recur in connection with this place, and pass on, by way of Cape de Verde, to the torrid and fetid swamps lying at the base of the Cameroons. Where we were to land I have no idea ; some one, I presume, knew ; but we were to land. Why ? To set dear little Jane on her legs with her bulbs and her escort for the thousand-mile tramp through the forests of Africa ! A bagatelle, so she assures me ; but then she was comforted by the fact that Alicia Jason, laden with tracts and petticoats, would travel with her. My brother, I stand amazed at our temerity !

"Truly we English are a race of marvellous energy, push, dogmatism—what you will ; and yet, in spite of these qualifications, we do not fight. As Voltaire discovered long ago, 'In England each man takes whatever road to heaven he pleases. If there were but one religion, they would have to fear its despotism ; if there were two only, they would cut one another's throats ; but as there

are thirty, they live peaceably and happily together.' Thus Voltaire in his time, and so we, my dear brother, live peaceably and happily together because of our diversity of aim and despite our evident antagonism.

"I was concerned, as you know, with efforts for the enlightenment and the lifting of humanity; I desired also to help towards the advancement of women. Guffles, and, with her, Lilian Roberts and Violet, desired to be permitted to sail their own yachts; and had the Board of Trade been less wooden, had it been endowed with the *nous* of a lobster, it would have tackled the problem and allayed the desire—but it is owl-headed. It cannot see. It is like a bull—it butts instead of leading.

"Alicia Jason desired to distribute petticoats in a region admittedly naked; she felt that mode of endeavour to be her vocation. I knew nothing of the question, but now I am beginning to think the distribution of such articles positively baneful. Looked at from this new point of view, I can only see degradation—for with the petticoats there travel always gin, whisky, and the scum of civilisation. I am appalled, remembering what I believed, to note these facts. But they are my honest opinion—they have come by degrees. It is now two months since I first undertook the leadership of this cruise—more since I first watched our friends in the Solent; and I am no longer, I pray, a machine to set down judgments and to dogmatise on subjects of which I have only heard one side, but a machine that strives to look more broadly afield than heretofore.

"Lady Jane desires, still, to sow her bulbs and propagate her tulips; Alicia Jason still wears the mask of set purpose, hears the cry of the witch doctor, the shriek of the jungle birds, and paints an elaborately massacred victim—better, I say now, the cry of the witch doctor than the cry of the savage drunk on gin; better the appalling degradation of unknown nakedness than the degradation of nakedness viciously hidden in smocks. You see, I have moved since last I wrote. My dear, dear brother, condole with the sorrowful ignorance of my past, but in mercy do not laugh at my present.

"Nevertheless, I say we have not fought, and in this my friends will bear me out. We are disappointed, some of us are saddened; but in spite of our evident diver-

gence of opinion we have not, in any sense, fallen out—but our trip, as it was conceived, is ended.

"Some of us are leaving on our arrival at Plymouth—Guffies, Lilian Roberts, and perhaps Violet, Sadie Cole, and Alicia Jason.

"There are others of our navigators who might possibly be leaving also—but fate holds them. Fate in the shape of Cupid with his bow drawn ready to strike. We who cannot remember to wind chronometers, and can by a mere passing negligence wreck the hopes of a score of friends—we, I say, stand back in some dudgeon and announce our intention to depart; but we who might probably have remembered the chronometers, seeing we had the ear of several estimable male navigators, are too engrossed with Cupid's whisperings to take any interest in departure.

"I foresee several engagements out of this duel. Stuart Walton—son of General Walton, V.C., by the way—will probably carry off pretty Helen Granger. Toby Slade, the versatile banjoist, is unquestionably in love with Elsie Collins; and she! My dear Stafferly, she sighs! Fancy Elsie, the slaughterer of Board of Trade bumbledom! But I am not yet at the end; my maid, as I hinted before, is distracted between the rival claims of two high priests of this Baal of ours—the bo'sun, a man who talks slang and dangles an arm as though it were broken, and Wo-sun, the captain's boy, a child with yellow cheeks, picturesque dress, and a cluck. At the moment matters stand pretty evenly between the two, and I harass myself with the knowledge that it is to me posterity will look should Fate so order events that the tailed man wins.

"Again, there is a person here, a German, who wears an enormous moustache and flaunts a torpedo beard; he is the purser, and his English is a thing to remember. How many of our bold navigators this gentleman has approached sighing I cannot say; once it was Lady Jane—fancy the dear, fat little aristocrat tied to a man with an accent you could burn!—then it was Lucy of the clipped speech, and she so frightened him with her devie cossies and her expie frillkies and all the rest of it, that he decamped. I hear he is still to be heard asking plaintively, 'Undo vat nashonality does zat latie pelong?'

"But he consoles himself, this man of the pen, and

has tried elsewhere, not forgetting while on the path of love our Sadie Cole and Lilian Roberts—the one an American widow with millions of dollars, I forget the total ; the other a daughter of the House of Vats ! He is, I assure you, an intrepid hunter, one of the type of whom dear Italy says, ‘ *Natura lo fece, e poi ruppe la stampa !* ’

“ Pheu ! I am tired, I am tired—still I continue resolute to my intention—while Violet remains I remain ; when she goes I too will go—for she is a sweet woman, and I fear scarcely as light-hearted as when we practised on Guffles’ yacht. Why ? Need you ask . . . you of the stern and conquering sex ? Still, *entre nous*, I fancy matters are a trifle strained between the two captains, which is only as might have been expected when you remember a man was ousted from his position and made to eat humble pie by a woman.

“ What were these friends of mine thinking of ? What, alas ! was I doing that I did not see at once the utter folly of attempting to officer a ship with women while the crew remained men ? Let the Board of Trade wag its senile head in comfortable peace. No such innovation is possible, until—well, to you I say it—until the stewards and stokers, the petty officers and engineers wear, all of them, petticoats, and woman has devised and settled upon a garment which shall permit her to usurp the office of sailor ; to man the boats, climb the rigging, and dangle at a string’s end, high aloft, without disquieting visions of stockings. When, in a word, the crew, from the bo’sun’s boy to the R.N.R. Commander, all are women—for, as Macaulay perceived, there is a fatal movement in this world of ships ; the women gravitate, open-armed, in smiles, towards mankind, and mankind stands on his pedestal to receive them. And so, in that day, oh, my brother ! if I should still be in the flesh, and am called upon to see these things anew, I pray you may administer to me a sleeping draught, potent as that of Juliet’s apothecary, and send as the delegate of womanhood some north country scribbler, with a sheaf of pens and paper and a sense of humour.

“ Vale,

“ Ever, my dear Brother, your affectionate Sister.

“ PS.—I want you and Carragh, *père*, and, if possible,

Sir Thomas Hatherly, to join us for a few days' cruise. We propose to run as far as Naples and back ; and if time presses you could return by the overland route.

"Come, we are lonely. I want my brother to get a breath of this glorious air, and to blow the worries of the Cabinet from his head—also, we desire a *raison d'être* for this final trip. Understand—I expect you.

"HONORIA."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HYPOTHESIS OF HEROISM

EIGHT o'clock, and the gong brazenly advertising the fact to the listening tramps, mailboats, and men-o'-war lying at anchor within the breakwater, and at the end of it files of trim-clad men descending the saloon staircase to view the "old 'un," or "'er 'ighness," at close quarters.

She stood just within the great folding doors amidst her young friends; visibly not young, visibly of the aristocrats, and acknowledged the salute of each as he came past. Her starers dangled peacefully at her side. She smiled with her eyes.

The men passed in, viewing the luxurious saloon with honest diffidence, and nudged each other to the chairs pointed out by scandalised stewards. They drew the backs of brown hands across their mouths in trepidation, even alarm, and waited until Lady Barraclough came to take the place of honour beneath the great carved symbol of Britannia in the main skylight. Then all sat.

At the head of each table were the officers of both sexes—Captain Carragh, Violet Ramsden, Sadie Cole, Walton with his arm in a sling, Rathbone, Slade, Helen Granger, Lucy Patterson; and dispersed at the sides were the crew and the Anti-'s. The dinner commenced. Before each guest stood a picturesque *menu*, headed with the date and the Company's arms. Beneath, in a delicate frame of silver scrollwork, was a list of the dishes.

Purée de petits pois.
Oysters au gratin.
Crème de volaille aux truffes.
Tournedos, sauce poivrade.
Vol-au-vent of pigeons à la chasseur.

Selle de mouton.
 Jambon braisé.
 Poulet Printanière.
 Gelée de Russe.
 Pouding glacé à la Messonier.
 Pailles à la diable.
 Fruit.
 Coffee.

The man with the nubby brow, sitting between two ladies, and desirous of letting them see he could read the thing, said to the steward who held the card—

"I'll begin at the top—the what-d'you-call-it—pooray pettit paws"—and under his breath, a trifle astonished at the sound of the words, "I guess I'll wolf it if it chokes me."

He did not brandish his amazement when he discovered the thing was soup, but bent over and sucked it audibly from a spoon which he held as though he were stoking.

The dinner proceeded to the buzz of voices gradually expanding with the advent of wine. A small fireman, with a glassy eye and bald head, attacked something viciously heated and closed his jaws like a gin—his face grew crimson, his eyes brimmed; but he swallowed the morsel and took a deep sip at a glass he found at his side, then said, "My word, but that's 'ot."

Some one laughed, and the bo'sun sitting opposite remarked audibly, "Cert'nly it's 'ot—it's tornado."

"Ah!" said he of the stokehold, "an' I can stand a bit of 'eat too. But," he added, sipping again at his tumbler, "I shouldn't like to fire up wi' that."

"Fire up!" said little Lady Jane, who sat on the bo'sun's left; "what is that?"

"Chuckin' coals into the furnace, miss, to make steam. There's coals an' coals. Some you can put on an' stand over an' warm yer 'ands at; others flare out when you lift the shovel to the fires an' lick the eyebrows hoff you. I've got no eyebrows, ner lashes, ner 'air . . . got 'em all licked hoff when I were a kid an' didn't know enough to keep meself warm. An' that's what this yer tornado stuff'll do fer a chap's inside," he concluded naively.

"Oh!" said Lady Jane, and retired from the contest. She was not interested in the man *per se*. She felt a passing concern at the fact that he was bald and eyebrow-

less from contact with fire ; but the mention of matters so crude as the effect of food on organs kept decorously out of sight was sufficient to break the thread. She leaned back and closed her eyes. The propagation of tulips in the kingdom of Ulanda was infinitely more in keeping with her æsthetic sense of colour. She desired, above all things, an end of this rather coarse mixture of the classes with the masses, and registered a vow to press for the consummation of her ideal. They had come this voyage ostensibly for the purpose of carrying out the wishes of the R.S.P.T., and on Lady Jane would fall the blame if she permitted these straying tendencies to mar their plans.

Elsewhere in the saloon voices were audible in laughing converse ; Lady Barraclough's among them, Carragh's, Violet Ramsden's. They, at all events, appeared to be enjoying the novelty of the affair—drawing the men out and bringing peals of merriment from the women. The voice of a sailor rose above the hum, reminiscent and comfortable as he toyed with a savoury plate of braised ham. Silence fell upon the people at the sound ; Lady Jane strained her neck to see him as he questioned, "Turn turtle? Rather—oh yes, I turned turtle right enough, just the same uz she did. It is like this—

"I'm down on the main deck doin' a prow, an' the old man. . . . 'Oo's 'e? E's the skipper, miss . . . an' the old man were on the poop. Sailin' ship she were, an' a hummer to go, an' we're racin' the *Thomas Stevens* home. Now this yer *Thomas Stevens* were a hummer too, an' on a wind she could best us, but wi' the wind a point free, we'd walk round her like a cooper round a cask—never wink. But here we are, hon a wind, an' the old man's on the poop to boss the show. There's a squall risin' up to win'ard, black as yer 'at, miss, an' the *Thomas Stevens* is to leu'ard.

"Me an' my mates," said the sailor with decision, "were all hon deck—fer we'd raced from Frisco with 'er—started wiv 'er—met 'er—said 'Ow-d'ye-do'—pawshed hon. Time an' again we'd seen 'er, an' 'ad a spin—now we're round the 'Orn, bowlin' up fer the trades, an' the wind's as shy uz a new-licked colt.

"The squall 'oozed. Whirroo! you could 'ear it lick the spray. We 'oozed—foam to the gutter ; every man 'anging hon to 'is string.

"'Stan' by !' says the old man.

"'Stan' by, it is,' says we.

"'Let go r'yal an' t'gall'nt 'allyards !' says the old man.

"'Give 'er beans, skip !' says we.

"'Beans it is !' he yells. 'Let go—her back teeth are awash with beans. Let go !'

"Miss," said the sailor solemnly, appealing to one of the smiling faces, "we'd let go—but them yards is hup, an' we're hover at any angle you care to speak about, an' they won't come down. They're fast. We 'oozed." The man's voice fell into a minor key as he ceased ; then some one asked ? "What happened ? How did it end ?" and he looked up, pleased as a child at the silence he had evoked.

"As for that," he resumed, with a note of pride in his voice, "nothin' happened. As our 'ouse lay down we clumb on to her side, an' when the sticks snapped hoff we stood by fer a wang hup to win'ard. But it never came, fer, you see, we were full to the 'atches wiv grain—Frisco grain—an' some of it uz shifted. We lay w'ere we fell."

"But what about the *Thomas Stevens* ?—didn't she come to your aid ?"

"'Ow could she ?" said the voice with a touch of scorn ; "she's to leu'ard, miss, two mile, an' we're smovered in a squall—rain, sea, wind ; enough to palsy a man. W'ite squalls they call 'em on the Plate¹—black is the colour I've mostly seen 'em."

"Then how did you survive ?"

"Sucked shirts," said the man, "chewed boots, fer the best part of a week, an' w'en that's done, licked the grass off 'er side."

"Side—whose side ?"

"Ship's side."

Lady Barraclough leaned forward in her place and said—

"What a terrible position—what did you think ? . . . what could you think ?"

"Think, me lady," said the sailor, with a suggestion of laughter in his voice. "I didn't think. Them uz thought went mad."

The dinner proceeded—sweets, savoury, fruit, coffee, and with the coffee cigarettes.

The man with the nubbly brow lighted one, and filled his mouth with smoke. He ejected it through his nose,

¹ Rio de la Plata.

his eyes, and ears in turn. He desired it to be plainly understood that cigarettes were a luxury he knew. Lady Jane watched his ears in amazement, and ventured to expostulate "Er . . . a . . . don't you think it is injurious?" she asked.

"Stimulates the brain, miss," he smiled, largely complacent.

"I should have supposed it would be more likely to addle it," she returned, with a desire to thrust home.

"Couldn't, miss," said he of the nubbly brow, "they were addled w'en I found 'em."

The bo'sun bent forward with a patronising smile.

"'Ee knows how many blue beans make five, miss," he remarked with a flourish. "'Ee's our sea-lawyer."

"Sea-lawyer—how funny! I didn't know you carried one."

"Oh yes we do," said the bo'sun, "we carry 'im like we carry a figure-'ead—an' 'ee's about the same amount o' use."

The man with the nubbly brow made no remark; he sipped his coffee and puffed smoke through his eyes. Lady Jane was fascinated; she stared at his hand, wondering whether presently he might take to ejecting the stuff from the pores of his skin; but it did not appear, and she fell to thinking what might happen if this man were properly trained in the correct smoke-environment, wherever that was, until a single blow struck hard on the gong drove the question from her mind.

Captain Carragh was standing at the head of his table, glass in hand. "The King," he said.

Everybody rose, drank their wine, and sat down—then, after the lapse of some minutes, the gong sounded again.

"The Queen," said Carragh. "God bless her."

The toast was taken standing; then all resumed their seats, and a voice sounded amidst the rustling, saying distinctly—

"I've often 'eard that gong smacked, an' wunnered wot 'twere for. Now I know. Fill up, steward. I could drink that tap all night . . . 'oo's next?" he questioned parenthetically.

Sadie Cole looked up from her seat at the head of his table and smiled—

"I was afraid you wouldn't care for this part of it," she said, "the champagne is a trifle sweet."

"Not sweeter than your pretty face, miss," said the man with a nervous shuffle; "but," he went on, as the laughter rilled up, "hif we're goin' to settle down to solid drinkin'—w'y' give me rum."

"Rum! Oh no. It is too heavy, and . . . and pungent."

The sailor tightened the knot in his black silk neckerchief, and tapped it into place beneath the wide blue collar.

"Maybe, miss," he replied; "but look at the taste it leaves in a man's mouth."

The gong sounded at this moment, and the sailor took up his glass ready to drink; but Sadie Cole, laughing at his haste, said—

"Wait, there will be a speech this time. Lady Barraclough wishes to thank you all—listen."

The autocrat stood at the head of her table, her eyes luminous, her manner calm.

"Captain Carragh, officers and men of the *Southern Cross*," she began; then amidst a profound silence, as the stewards stood back immovable, she went on, "I have asked you to meet us here to-night in order that I may tell you one or two things which have forced themselves upon me during our short stay together. I don't know that I can say anything that you have not heard before; I don't know that I can suggest anything, or bid you aim at anything in particular. I only know that you have taught me, shamed me, and made me feel the littleness of our rather noisy egoism.

"We came here with an object. We desired to see an equality of the sexes at sea; to make men recognise that we, too, are fitted to take command on the great waters; but you have shown me the impossibility of it; the terrible risks; our unfittedness to combat them; and I accept the lesson."

A low murmur of applause ran down the tables. Carragh fidgeted in his chair, and several of the anti-'s shrugged expostulatory shoulders. But Lady Barraclough went on without heeding.

"There is nothing," she said, "that appals me so much as the consideration of our extreme helplessness; there is nothing that daunts me so effectually as the knowledge, slowly ripening, that our mental and physical capacities are

as the zenith and nadir of actuality. Our will is transcendent—our ability to do, the grant of a miser doling pence.

"As ships pass in the night, and speak each other in passing, so we draw near our ideals, glance at them, signal feebly of our desire, and creep away to hide in the mists with which we are surrounded; we are impotent—impotent."

Lady Barraclough's voice rang with pathos as she stood there to make her expiation. The firm lines of her unbeautiful mouth were modulated, as was the tone in which she spoke; the grey, incurved locks seemed to predicate now the necessity for respect—not laughter; but the eyes held fire; the strong brow, creased deeply over the nose, told eloquently of the masterful intellect lying behind.

An intense silence had fallen upon her guests. Those who just now had shrugged shoulders sat still to listen and wonder. No one had dreamed of this. Five minutes ago all had been laughter, joking—the inevitable badinage of a dinner where men and women meet untroubled by convention. Now Lady Barraclough was on her feet, and even he of the nubbly brow kept silence.

"I speak to-night," the grey, bowed figure resumed, "under a deep sense of the necessity for personal effacement. We came this voyage, I repeat it—cock-a-hoop. We had decided beforehand that there was nothing woman was not competent to attempt; no mode of life too arduous for her; no trials, no feats of endurance too brutal for her strength. We are the friends and comrades of women who are doctors, lawyers, councillors, travellers—and were very sure of our competence—but we are conquered.

"Conquered—not because we are of less intellect, not because we are unable to grapple with the problems presented to us by navigation; but because of our physical incapacity, our hampering garments. Our will is strong; our ability to do is feeble—you perceive that?"

For a moment Lady Barraclough's voice had leaped into the old key: her eyes flashed as they had flashed that night when first a diversity of opinion became manifest among her friends on the bridge; but the note was short-lived, and it went out altogether as she continued.

"Yet," she said in her ringing contralto, "that is not wholly true. There are problems out here which only time can teach effectually : there are problems, too, which three months' study with a coach can make one competent to solve—and I leave them in other hands. If they are worth attempting I am sure men will be found ready to attempt them. If they are possible of amelioration, I am confident there are men who will undertake to ventilate the fact—and if I, a woman, am in any way able to assist, or advise, or provide funds for such an object, I am ready to do so—or, at all events, to do what I can.

"But I did not intend to intrude the personal pronoun so largely, or to treat you to a dissertation on the ethics of woman's aim, when I asked you to meet me here to-night. I intended, on the contrary, to speak to you, indeed, to thank you for giving me the opportunity to form a new opinion of mankind ; but I find it difficult—difficult.

"The mind is so complex, thought so immense, speech so futile to express it. I desire to acknowledge my indebtedness ; I wish to thank you in tones that shall reach—yet the words fail to express the meed of praise that is your due. I desire to emphasise the nobility of your endeavours, the disregard you showed for personal safety—but the phrase rings tame. There is nothing there said as I desired to say it ; there is nothing of my intention in my words. Do you understand me ? Do you recognise why I long for the tongues of men and of angels ?

"Gentlemen, there was a moment during that night of chaos when I began to see things as they are, and understood something of the degradation into which I had fallen. It was awe-inspiring. I can never know that feeling again—it is past ; sunk deep in my heart, and only the memory of it stands out to warn me. I, a woman—not strong . . . not physically endowed—had made mock of mankind ; I had held it up to derision on platform and rostrum. Man, *in esse*, was a thing too unendurable to be worth consideration ; man, as he was presented to my comprehension, was an impossible adjunct to any environment—if the world was to remain pure. I had forgotten my childhood, the gentle mother-touch ; the father's hand—my sisters, brother ; I was supremely and irrefragably bound up in egoism—then I saw you fight. I saw the

seething waters, heard the hiss of the spume—a white terror that sizzled in the angry blackness ; and it came back to me that there are works which men can accomplish ; works no woman can touch—and I thank you for the lesson.”

The grey face showed deeper lines as Lady Barraclough stood a moment in silence. Her eyes had a new gleam in them ; the grey, incurved locks seemed very appropriate—but in a moment, taking her glass in hand, she lifted it before her, and with straightened brows went on—

“Gentlemen ! We hold it an honour to be among you. We hold it as one of the proudest moments of our lives, that we, through your efforts, have been able to add to the list of those rescued from the grip of the sea. And I, personally, hold this as the supreme hour of my triumph—the hour in which I climb down from that perch on which I have sat too long blindly crowing. As Wolsey climbed down from his, so I climb down. Some of you know his words ? He spoke them after the king had flung him. ‘No king flings me but egoism—and him I fling.’ And so I give you Wolsey’s words—

“‘Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness !
This is the state of man ; to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope ; to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him ;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost ;
And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening—nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do.’”

A low murmur of applause broke from the tables as the ringing voice paused, then it rolled out—cheer upon cheer until Carragh lifted his hand for silence. Lady Barraclough was lifting hers too. She stood with her glass held high.

“Can I add anything to that ?” she questioned. “I don’t know that I should attempt it—but one thing I must say, if you will bear with me a moment longer.

“The papers by some extraordinary perversity have taken these deeds of yours and given them to us. They are not ours. We did not win them, and I shall do what is possible to rectify the misstatements which have been made. I shall, if possible, so represent the matter that

you may be enabled to reap what reward your country considers your due.

"Captain Carragh, officers, and men of the *Southern Cross*, we drink your health."

Again the cheers broke forth, roll upon roll—the deep-throated shout of men held spellbound by that silver voice; and, at the end of it, the gong pealing one booming note, to point the fact that Carragh had risen and was waiting to reply.

"Lady Barraclough," he said, "you have given me a difficult task. I scarcely know how to answer—but I must, and so I will tackle it. To begin with, I think you do us too much honour. I think you are inclined to make too much of an incident that happens often enough and is never heard of—except as a fact to be recorded in the *Shipping Gazette*—and in acknowledging this I acknowledge that we, at all events, are lucky in our environment.

"It happened, as I say, comfortably for us; but, as far as we are concerned, there was nothing in it—nothing, I believe, that any British sailor would have shrunk from attempting. It appears to be a great thing to you, because, if I may venture to say so, you are unaccustomed to the conditions, and have not spent your life fighting for supremacy at sea. To the unaccustomed eye it naturally seemed a perilous business; but to the sailor, no more perilous than is tight-rope dancing to an acrobat.

"The furling of a top-s'l down in the forties, when the yards are icebound and the sail whangs stiff in the darkness, like a great steel sheet, is a perilous business. The greaser bending amidst revolving machinery is engaged in a perilous duty; but it is his duty, and he thinks nothing at all of the smashing power of the iron that may touch him.

"Oh, there are thousands of unconscious heroes in this world of ships; to attempt to enumerate them would be wearisome to you and to me, but among them there stand out one or two that may prove interesting as suggestions of what is possible to different types. The man who keeps a cool head when his vessel is running before the giant seas of Cape Horn, and does not turn to look upon the peril rushing behind, is a hero; the crew who go about their work saying nothing of the fire that is raging in the hold beneath them, because, forsooth, a word would frighten

the women, are heroes too ; the engineers, trimmers, and firemen who stick to their posts, start the pumps, ease the fires, and regulate the steam when they know they have been hit, and their vessel is sinking—they, too, are heroes. Every one of them is a hero—but it is part and parcel of their profession ; they have lived to understand the greater peril—the peril of cowardice—and so they stand still, and face what is before them. There is nothing in it. They do not ask to be called heroes—nor do we. We only ask that when a British sailor is confronted with danger, no charge of cowardice shall be registered against him.

“ For the rest we thank you. Against your experiment I have nothing to urge. A man who believes himself in these days the cock of the walk, a person who cannot be aided, is a fool, and we hope he will remain on shore. For your good wishes and generous desires we thank you too ; but we ask you to remember that here, as elsewhere, there are more than two types of sailor-man—the blow-hard and the steady-does-it—but I will not attempt to divide them up or to dissect them. These two are the predominant species ; the latter are generally English, the former frequently ‘ Dutch.’ We have too many ‘ Dutch’ among us ; it is one of the problems waiting to be solved by somebody — I am not referring now to the obviously Dutch, but to the type which bears that label at sea. He is an unpleasant shipmate, and, to make my meaning clear to those of us who are not accustomed to him, I will remind you of the story all sailors know of the Dutchman at a Liverpool public-house—that, I think, will suffice to point my meaning.

“ It was blowing hard—a gale of wind, in fact—and the tiles were flying. But the Dutchman knew nothing of the dangers of the tiles, and bragged to his friends.

“ ‘ Plow, San Antonio, plow !’ he cried. ‘ Plow goodt nor’-vester, plow !’ he shouted, ‘ andt ven I come out at sea plow more hardt than you can.’

“ His friends patted him on the back and vowed he was a brave chap, and they took drinks with him and helped him to get rid of his money. Then one day, when he was skinned, our friend shipped for New York, and came across a nor’-wester.

“ The men were called up to shorten sail. They turned out, all but the Dutchman, who could not be found.

When the hands had gone aloft the mate went to look for him. He discovered him kneeling on the fo'c'sle deck, crooning softly under his breath. 'Plow jently, sweet nor'-vester!' he said; 'plow more jently, for I vos only shoking mit you ven I say that in the public-houze.'

"That man was a hero," said Carragh with a twinkle, "but until the mate told him so he didn't know it."

The commander resumed his seat amidst a roar of laughter, and ten minutes later the dinner was a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XXV

YOU—HIM—HIS

A GUNBOAT stole into the harbour to the cry of a man in the chains, nosed about like a dog seeking to recover a lost trail, and presently came to anchor close beside the *Southern Cross*. Whistles sounded on her decks, cables rattled, gongs clashed, lights were hoisted. The man who had shouted from the lead platform had climbed on board.

Carragh reclined in a long deck chair beneath the bridge awning. On every hand were ships—ships at anchor, ships moored, ships stealing over the glassy waters of the bay, and from them all ran the quivering gleams of light, white, red, green, white—scores of white, all trembling, evanescent, like chain lightning flashing on a bank of clouds. Across there was the breakwater's red signal, staring mistily on water it turned to blood; up the bay, Mount Batten, blinking without pause, automatic, a thing to jar the eye; beyond the gunboat the shadowy outline of Mount Edgcumbe, with its ceaseless roll of breaking surf drumming a monotone on the harbour gong. A still, quiet night, and, now the gunboat had crept to her berth, a dark and restful hour. For a space Carragh had prowled busily up and down, watching the stranger manœuvring into position; now she slept, and he, too, climbed to the bridge to smoke and think. The tip of his cigar, glowing like a red-hot coal, was the only spark of light on the railed-in space he occupied.

From the platform forward came the steady tramp of the watch, marching on indiarubber-covered gratings. But Carragh did not see him, and scarcely heard the squelch he made in passing. Thoughts chased each other

rapidly. Lady Barraclough's speech, Violet Ramsden's subtle influence, her unaccountable anger ; the gunboat, an aristocrat of the sea, pointing out to him the position which might have been his—together, singly, in shouts, in whispers, the things assailed him ; desires he could not still crept out of the silent blackness.

A still, hot night, early for junketters ashore, late for the most active off-duty soul on board ship ; 10.30, in other words, and the quartermaster halted from his walk to receive reports. Downstairs in the music-room the piano throbbed to a ringing march, then fell merrily amidst a parcel of Irish airs, scattering them one upon another, shouting them in the ears of the lonely man.

Across the way a deep-throated bell tolled five strokes—tong-tong . . . tong-tong . . . tong—and a bugle raved brazen orders to the watch. Carragh glanced up. A light at the truck of the flagship lying farther down the bay winked, a long and irascible remark about a boat still lying off the Batten Breakwater, then, with a pirouette, the admiral turned his attention on the gunboat. He desired to know, in spots and dashes, when the devil he intended to report, and the gunboat, newly arrived from African waters, blinked an abashed response. It said a boat, with an officer in charge, had started.

Carragh watched the little comedy. Over there the admiral, fiery, full of dinner, jealous of discipline ; close at hand a gunboat, rusty from thrashing across the bay, just arrived, an eyesore to the sleek fighting ships, and a lieutenant-commander figuring out the hole it would make in his pay to get her presentable.

Three globe lanterns climbed to the signal yard of a distant ship, and the light at her truck winked long and short splashes at the dallying boat. "Crew aboard !" it said ; "come alongside." But to the admiral, frothing on his gallery, it said nothing of the kegs of paint it was "finding," nor of the cost in kind it would give—which is as it should be in the best of all possible navies, thumb-ruled from Whitehall.

The *Southern Cross* lay so near her chum, the gunboat, that it was easy to hear the officer of the watch slating his crew, and the patter of naked feet as the men ran quickly in answer. "Cause and effect," Carragh mused : "admiral crusty ; officers hurt ; crew on the move."

As Lady Barraclough had reminded him some time before, Carragh might have been one of those officers, possibly, by this time, a commander wearing the oak-leaf, the bands and single curl instead of the plaited anachronism that decorated his cuff, branding him as one of the two R.'s. As an expert navigator, accustomed to drive through anything and in all weathers, no naval officer could touch him, for no naval officer can gain the sea-going experience that is possible in ships of the Mercantile Marine; yet Whitehall branded him two R's instead of one, gave him obsolete guns to practise with, a dock-moored hulk to drill in, and threatened him with penalties for volunteer service now he was theirs!

The white ash of the cigar glowed crimson, and the air was redolent of a fragrant Havana as the matter stole across Carragh's brain. Well, for one thing, at all events, he had reason to be thankful. He was not mulcted in the cost of paint and gilt work for his ship's side; and his pay would make the lieutenant-commander, tugging at a well-worn sword-belt across the way, green with envy. Still, it was not the Navy; and although Whitehall pinches in paint, it gives adequate means for communication.

Again, as the fact dawned, the cigar end glowed, and with a puff of smoke came the thought, "On the whole, I think I would pay for the paint if only they would give me the Morse code and a flash-light."

Downstairs the piano spoke softly with a sound like running water; it mingled with the ripple of the surf rolling out there in the darkness at the foot of Mount Edgcumbe. Farther up the bay a light blinked into space from the flagship's masthead—dot—dot—dash . . . dash—dot—dash—dot . . . a whole string of orders, remarks, and at last the signalman's "Thank God," for had not the admiral's servant reported that his lordship snored? Across the way the lieutenant-commander betook himself and his calculations to the chart-room sofa, to sit and wonder now when the night would end; when, when the day would come; whether leave would be possible for a man so hampered by rust and grime; and whether that wife of his, looking so radiant in a frame at the foot of his bunk, was at Devonport yet to meet him.

Ten forty-five! The hours before daylight trailed mythically interminable.

A puff of smoke, long retained, slowly ejected—and to Carragh came the thought. There are compensations. Always there are compensations. Downstairs, for instance, were Sadie Cole, Lady Barraclough, a dozen women, and among them Violet—lately one of the *Rajah's* quarter-masters. The piano in the place of lavender and frills announced the fact of her presence. No one else had that touch; no one else could play those haunting Irish airs and make them musical; no one else could ramble from key to key, slip from major to minor, and stir soul from a piano accustomed to thumping.

Carragh could see her sitting there as he had seen her in those days of long ago; but on the gunboat's deck a lieutenant-commander must be content to eat out his heart before a picture framed at the foot of his bed; while a lieutenant-commander of the two R brand might content himself, if he dared, by a glance at a queenly figure; listen, perchance, to a queenly remark; fancy, even, a registration of the fact that the queen knew she was queenly, and that he, who had taught her to hold the sextant and name the stars, might, in telling her so, acknowledge the addenda, that she was also his.

In truth there were compensations. It was almost worth the plaited gold lace to be near enough to hear her voice, to see her sometimes; and certainly it had been worth the initiatory stages when she had looked so white under the stars she struggled to master; so entrancing with the sextant held at an angle which necessitated aid—manes—manes! Across the waters, across the years, out of the darkness the voices spoke, cried out, and would not be still. Violet with the flashing eyes; Violet with the bell-like laugh, the haunting voice—she held the silent man, tumbling the two R problem with the question of paint and pay and position, while he rolled a cigar and blew soft clouds of smoke. She held him . . . but, did he hold her?

An impatient movement of the glowing ash, a shower of white dust; an almost imperceptible shrug registering anathemas on that incomprehensible folly of his which had set him astride the Mercantile Marine, when, had he followed his father's wishes, he would have been a naval officer now

and her equal, unequivocally her equal. But he was the commander of a mailship; at the moment, of a yacht, and liable at any time to dismissal by a board of directors, who, above all things, were business men. How was it possible that he could compare his position with the position of the man across the water? Absurd. It was redolent of the brand; redolent of the anachronism decorating his cuff. What was he? Captain of the *Southern Cross*. Pish! he had no title—the man in charge of that ketch, stealing past the breakwater, was also a captain, and spelled his title with a terminal G—Captain! Dared he aspire? He dared many things—aspiration, hope, ambition among them; but here was no room for either. He sat on the top rung—supreme; his brother in the title bossed a ketch!

Again the shrug, indefinite, suggestive—the top rung; but the ladder was built of four steps—ridiculous!

Across his brain there flashed a signal-line—"Too low they build who build beneath the stars."

The rhythm haunted him. It beat like the roar of a surf falling musically amidst the rocks of an iron-bound coast; it throbbed as the piano throbbed downstairs, where people were playing crooning Irish airs; laughing and throwing glances. Like the lieutenant-commander on the gunboat, Carragh sat alone staring at pictures, hearing phrases, praying for opportunity.

And if the opportunity came, would he seize it? Would the queen permit him? Apparently the queen would not; apparently she was angry, and an angry woman—but the queen can do no wrong! She was supreme—the maker and fashioner of her own pleasures, her own destiny. Who was he that he should intrude upon her with hopes that were his, not hers; ambitions, desires that were part of a past that was his, not hers?

The questions troubled him, and he rose to pace slowly to and fro the bridge deck. On the gunboat, in the glare of a couple of globe lamps, he could see the lieutenant-commander arisen from his couch and walking also. A dozen steps forward, turn, a dozen back—a fisherman's march, "two steps and overboard;" but it told of the restless spirit within. Why did he walk at this hour? Why had he not remained on the chart-room sofa until that boat of his came back from reporting, or gone to

bed? The admiral's signals scarcely accounted for it. Nothing that men could see accounted for it. It was a touch of the thrill that captures men of the sea when, after a long conflict with the world of waters, the flesh and the devil confront them in the silence of an anchorage close to the homes they love. Carragh knew the thrill of that message—Home! Home! "I am coming, oh, my love, to thee," as only those who have stood in the world's lone spaces can know it; and it beat upon him now, as it beat upon that restless figure pacing to and fro the gun-boat's quarter, up and down, allaying desire.

Carragh descended the bridge ladder with a sigh that might have been a groan, and came to the promenade. Passing the music-room, he caught the sound of voices and glanced within. Sadie Cole stood with her arm round Violet's waist; they leaned together smiling and talking with Toby Slade. Apparently, too, they found his quips amusing; but the girl's face held the lonely man. She looked so white, so statuesque, so queenly. He passed on, thrillingly alive to the fact that she was also beautiful—a queen in a garden of roses.

Farther back in the room he had caught glimpses of the other officers and ladies; they were all grouped, all paired, yet Carragh had felt no desire to enter. Since that morning on the promenade Miss Ramsden had seemed anxious to avoid his company; even last night, when every one had congratulated him on his speech, she had held aloof.

He questioned what could be the reason. Something, presumably, he had done or had left undone. They had been such good friends, too; when Lady Barraclough had appeared most objectionable, in the early days of this difficult cruise, Violet had softened the blows, and made it possible to sit still. Now she avoided him. He searched his memory to discover a cause—any; and he could only remember that it was the morning of her resignation. But that surely was an impossible reason; for had she not often told him she wished to resign? Even at Falmouth, less than a week ago; and at the picnic, up the Porthcuel River! A luminous day. Cha! it was since—since. When, then, was it?

A sentence escaped the network and fell on his ear—"I did not know you were so anxious to smooth matters for me. If I had known—of course——"

She said that. Why? Because she was annoyed with a steward or cook who had given vile coffee to the men? Absurd. It intensified the problem, it obscured the issues, it did not enlighten him a whit. Carragh marched slowly to and fro, listening to the music, catching glimpses of white dresses, uniforms—noting the laughter, and mentally calling himself an ass for his pains. Yet he could not rest. Like the lieutenant-commander on the gunboat's deck he walked aching.

A figure came out of the drawing-room and halted, searching the gloom. It was Lady Barraclough. No one else had that gait. No one else carried her head pushed forward from shoulders that were round. No one else wore those incurved locks, yet when Carragh saw her he moved up the deck to meet her.

There had been a day when he would have hastened to his room; but that was past—Lady Barraclough no longer stung.

"I saw you go by," she said as they met. "Why don't you join us?"

Carragh, startled, and brought horribly to task, excused himself by the plea of duty, and went on to say that even now he must write letters—a fact which troubled him.

"Hum! I am sorry," said the strong, musing voice. "I hoped we should all meet—just this time; the last for some of us."

Carragh met her eyes and said—

"The last, Lady Barraclough? I did not know."

"Really?" the shoulders were lifted a trifle in sarcasm.

"Indeed no. I thought it had been decided that you would take one more cruise, under my guardianship this time. May I ask who is leaving?"

"Miss Guffles and Miss Roberts—certainly," Lady Barraclough announced, then paused.

The air was electric. Others were leaving too, that was easily gathered; but Carragh asked no further question. "I am sorry," he put in; "believe me, I am very sorry."

Lady Barraclough noted his aloofness. She had come a long way since that afternoon off Dover when she had decided that Carragh must resign, yet her voice was a trifle grim and uncompromising as she resumed—

"My brother, the Earl of Stafferly, and two other men are joining us to-morrow. The House is up and the

ghost of the lady navigators laid, at all events for the recess, so we propose to take the trip you speak of. You see, although some are going, there are others coming. It will be a change—perhaps for the better.”

Carragh acknowledged that it would be as Lady Barraclough said, but ventured nothing farther. He was occupied with the fact that others were leaving, and bracing himself to ask whether, by chance, Violet . . . Miss Ramsden, was among those who were tired of the trip, the dulness, the idiocy of fiddling on strings admittedly broken. Then Lady Barraclough’s voice took up the thread with, “Mrs. Cole had thoughts of leaving, too ; but I understand she has nearly determined to remain in spite of the fact that Violet—Miss Ramsden, you know—is one of those who leave us.”

Carragh halted for perhaps two seconds, then fell into pace again and said, “Miss Ramsden leaving—also ? I am sorry . . . er, it strikes me I am punished for bringing you to England when you wished for France.”

The words fell with scarcely a tremor ; but thereafter the tremors ran. They leaped about him, filled his brain, touched his muscles, made sport of his strength. The air of the Sound had grown suddenly heavy : conversation had become a difficulty ; he desired time to think.

Violet was going away. She was tired of this ghost-chasing. Without a word, in spite of the days that had been, she was going away—and Sadie Cole, the girl who said what she thought, smoked cigarettes, and was to him as a chum, had decided to remain. She had mentioned a design upon the British Peerage, an earl for choice, and now she was going to stay to catch Lady Barraclough’s brother. It mattered nothing . . . the only thing that pulsed, throbbed, and kept him silent was the fact that Violet—Again Lady Barraclough interrupted the hurrying fancies with a sentence that mocked the suggestion he had offered.

“It would have been possible to grow tired and leave the ship, even in France, Captain Carragh.”

“True—but this simplifies matters,” he answered, clinging to his idea, despite the held-out proof.

“I should much like to persuade her to remain,” Lady Barraclough accentuated, watching him.

"If you have no influence with her," Carragh's steady lips proclaimed, "who has?"

"Um-m-m!" said Lady Barraclough.

They continued to walk with bent heads, and eyes searching the planks for unseen pitfalls. Lady Barraclough's attitude pointed to her preoccupation—hands clasped behind her, one dangling, the other gripped firmly at the wrist, as though it were a ham-bone and she carried it. Carragh had nothing to say; but the notions rilled until his companion came to a halt at the saloon entrance and turned her luminous gaze upon him.

"If you can think of any one, Captain Carragh," she said with a slight accent on the pronoun, "I hope you will ask him to use his influence."

You—him—his; that was the end. Lady Barraclough passed downstairs to her room, and Carragh crept back to lean against the rail; to note the inflection and ponder on the identity of that hypothetical being who might presume to thwart the wishes of the queen who could do no wrong.

. . . You—him—his.

The subtlety escaped him

CHAPTER XXVI

IN THE EYE OF THE MOON

CARRAGH entered his room and closed the door. On the other side of the after-partition was the place of lavender and frills ; within it the officers, responsible and irresponsible, together with those other pioneers of light and learning who desired to sample the soil of Ulanda, propagate tulips, and swathe in prickly petticoats legs hitherto seen innocently naked. The music had ceased, but a confused buzz proclaimed the fact that people talked, laughed, and probably flirted—the thing annoyed.

Carragh came to the table, switched on his electric reading lamp, found paper, envelopes, pen, and commenced to write.

“MY DEAR HARRISON” (he set at the head of a sheet),—
“What on earth made you pick me out to play the fool among a lot of women who know about as much of——”

Here he stopped, nibbled the penholder, decided there was too much light in the room, and touched his bell. Two minutes later Wo-sun appeared within the curtain hanging across the open door.

“Yes, seh?” he questioned, blinking.

“Switch off those forward lamps, Sammy, and get my cot ready.”

“Ye—ye—ye—yes, seh.”

There was an unusual species of cluck in Sammy’s speech, and Carragh glanced up, watching him with bent brow. The boy moved across the room stifling sobs.

Carragh turned to his desk. He knew that at a word of encouragement Sammy would collapse into tears, and as

he had not the smallest desire to play wet-nurse to a Chinese boy, he contemplated the note he had written. But on reading it over he discovered nothing of his intention set down.

"No—that is scarcely what I meant . . . confound the thing!" he said.

He took the sheet, and tearing it into small fragments, dropped them into a basket beneath the table. Again he wrote hurriedly—

"MY DEAR HARRISON,—I wonder whether you can run down and look us up? We require no end of patching—morally, I mean, for of course there has been no collision or any trouble of that sort. We want a bit of stiffening, too—at least, I do—and the sight of your broad back would——"

"No—I'll be shot if it would," said Carragh, and again made mincemeat of the paper. From the other side of the room came a prolonged snivel, a childish sob that sounded like the clack of a sucking pump—kha—kha—kha . . . kha—kha——

"Stop that noise," said Carragh, swinging round on his chair. "How do you think I can write if you make that hullabaloo—eh?"

"Ye—ye—ye—yes, seh," said Sammy.

He proceeded to lower the cot, and Carragh began on a fresh sheet.

"MY DEAR HARRISON (he wrote),—I am in a most horrible quandary. I told you what a time I had with the autocrat before we ran into that gale, and how Captain Ramsden backed me up. Well, now, if you can credit it, the autocrat is like butter, jam, squish—anything soft and syrupy—and Captain Ramsden is——"

Again Carragh paused and stared at the written words. "What is she?" he questioned half aloud, "and what is that to Harrison—or to me—or to . . . Sammy?" he cried out as he took up the letter, found an empty plate, and setting fire to the paper, carefully pushed the ashes together in a heap. "Sammy, how in the world do you think I am going to write if you make that infernal row?"

"Don' know, seh," said Sammy, startled.

He loosened one of the tackles by which the cot was slung to the upper deck and let it slip. The bed swung back against a chair and toppled it sidelong upon the deck.

"Ah!" said Carragh.

"Silly—billy—lilly sing slippit," said Sammy, demoralised and staring; "*mo-pen-ki-ti* . . . for what can do that?"

"Sammy," said Carragh, "you are swearing. Come here."

The boy approached. Down the front of his blue silk coat were long wet marks. In the corner of his eyes were tears—across his plump saffron cheek was a distinct mark—four fingers and a palm. Sammy's left ear burned.

"Well," said Carragh, "as you have destroyed my harmony, made me spoil three sheets of paper, and burn some of the ship's best china—perhaps you will condescend to explain what it means."

"Condesen," said Sammy with a dim smile; "what that?"

Carragh pointed to the slapped cheek. "How did that come?—tell me all about it," he ordered.

Sammy clucked, the tears welled; he kicked with his feet, struggling for words. "Nussing come, seh," he articulated. "I fall down—blake um head one time."

"But there are four fingers there, Sammy, and the flat of some one's palm. Whose now?—tell me."

Sammy shook his head.

"Speck I fall on piecee lope," he suggested.

"Hum!" said Carragh. "Well, we will pass that—what happened before?"

"I kiss my lillee gell," the boy returned with a dismal snuffle.

"Hah!" said Carragh, "that's dangerous . . . hum, the vixen!"

Sammy looked up through brimming eyes. "What that, seh?" he asked.

"A lady fox, my boy. An animal that will never get a look in at Nirvana if all they say of her is true."

Sammy stared.

"All tly go to Nirvana sometime," he asserted. "Get hash up in other skin first—then come back, tly again."

Some day Silly Ha'gleaves get come back allee samee dog—look for Sammy—tly makee all light—then——” He broke off, clucking and straining his neck like a hen.

“Cicely Hargreaves, eh? Lady Barraclough’s maid. Now what on earth possessed you to kiss her?” Carragh questioned, sitting forward in his chair and taking a cigarette.

“All velly nicee gell,” said Sammy with a forlorn gurgle. “Kissee befor.”

“And she didn’t object, eh?—speak up.”

“No, seh. Like-um. Ask me come walkee lound sky-light. So I go—sit down—talkee long time. All light. No closs with me—closs with bo’sun. Say me nice, soft, like putty. Say she likee kiss putty—make-um hair glow.”

“Kind of her,” said Carragh, stifling a desire to laugh. “Anything else?”

“Say me nice kid, seh. Pull my alm lound her—then bo’sun go bye. Bo’sun look-see——”

“Um!” said Carragh; “then you have got hold of a flirt.”

Sammy looked up, round-eyed, eager, full of hope. “Flirt?” he said; “what that?”

“A girl that spoons with two or three men at the same time.”

“Spoon, seh?” Sammy clucked.

“Kissee, cuddle, make love.”

“That bad,” said Sammy. “*Tu-ne-ah-ma.*”

Carragh leaned on one arm watching this smooth-faced blunderer. The position was very easy to read, but it was ludicrous, and the boy’s chagrin so palpably evident; he had a mind to probe the wound still farther, to discover, if possible, how deep the hurt had gone.

“And so,” he said, “the bo’sun gave you that cuff, eh?”

“No, seh, I fall down,” said Sammy.

“Um—m—m—m!” Carragh mused.

The boy waited some few seconds longer, but as his commander made no further remark, and appeared to be engaged in studying the fallen chair, Sammy returned to his labours. He replaced the chair, gathered in the tackle, and brought the cot to its correct level, perhaps three feet above the deck, and commenced to make the bed. Carragh stared at the little heap of burnt paper, at the pen and blotting-pad, then rose and lighted

his cigarette. He walked slowly up and down the cabin.

"Sammy," he said at length, "have nothing to do with Englishwomen, they are too big for you."

"Big gell velly nice, seh," Sammy clucked.

Carragh took no notice ; he paced to and fro smoking and giving his opinion in a way that would have been impossible with an English servant. "Now understand me," he said ; "our women, and especially passenger women, are not for you. You are too small and young. Wait till you go back to Shanghai and tackle one of your own sort. If you want to go home before your contract runs out I will send you, but you must have nothing to do with our women. They are difficult to understand. We find that—but you ; well, in any case we don't allow mixed marriages in England—savvy ?"

"Mixed mallage, seh ?" Sammy questioned ; "what that ?"

"Turk and Christian ; nigger and white girl ; Chinaman and white girl—see what I mean ?"

"Yes, seh."

"And as for Lady Barraclough's maid—well, to be candid, she's only pulling your leg, you know."

Sammy glanced down at the white pantaloons drawn neatly in at the ankle and said, "Pullee my leg, seh ? what that ?"

"Making a fool of you, my boy—laughing at you."

"Can do," said Sammy with a gulp.

"Women, especially white women," Carragh proceeded, "are full of caprice ; they play with men as an angler plays with a trout ; they smile when he kicks at the end of the line ; they laugh at the sight of the red blood at his gills—they have no mercy, no thought, no compunction ; they pull him this way, that way—jerk, cuff, and finally kill him, smiling all the time."

"That bad, seh," Sammy announced, standing with his head thrust forward, staring and listening intently. "*Tu-ne-ah-ma !*" he added under his breath.

"A man," Carragh remarked sternly as he moved up and down, "a man who makes love to an Englishwoman is an idiot ; a man who thinks she will love him if he is unable to give her diamonds and a house in Park Lane, is a fool ; but a Chinese boy who thinks Lady Barraclough's

maid intends to marry him, deserves . . . what do you imagine he deserves, eh, Sammy?"

Sammy clucked uncomfortably, but he looked curious. "Plaps nutting, seh," he suggested; "plaps toe-kick, one time."

"Precisely. Or, in other words, a boy who plays the fool with passenger women," Carragh announced standing quite still, "gets spread-eagled and feels the sole of my slipper. My cot ready?"

"Yes, seh."

"Very well, cut away to bed. I am going to turn in."

Now on the promenade, just outside the captain's door as the boy took his departure, was the "tall lă'y, lound, nicee big hat," whose name Sammy could never remember. She moved up beside him at once, remarking very distinctly—

"My! you have been an age. Where's Captain Carragh?"

"He go bed," Sammy grinned.

"Turned in—asleep? Why, we must see him—tell him Mrs. Cole has to speak to him, now, straight off."

"No can do, missy—capin plenty too much biznis—tired allee samee dog."

Carragh came to the door and opened it wide, "All right, Sammy, don't expatiate," he said, and advanced to meet Mrs. Cole.

"Well," said that lady, a trifling drawl echoing in the laughter, "you do take things coolly and no mistake. Do you want us all to go? Do you by any chance want *her* to go—and without so much as a word, to you—Paddy?"

"I don't know that I have any right to attempt to prevent either you—or any of your friends going—if——"

"High horse! My!"

Carragh came near, speaking very earnestly—

"Not at all, Mrs. Cole; sheer undiluted heartache, blues, cowardice. I'm sick of my position; sick of the whole business, if you like. Still, if you go I admit the position will be worse, and if Lady Barraclough goes I shall be very sorry; but if—Miss Ramsden goes, it will be . . . I shall know that . . . Oh! good Lord, you don't expect me to bare my heart to you as though I were a boy?—why——"

"No," said Mrs. Cole, with a swift rush to stop him, "I

expect you to bare it to *her*—there she is. Do be sensible. Go and have it out."

She moved away at once and Carragh turned to see Miss Ramsden leaning over the rail by the starboard gun screen ; and in a moment he was beside her, looking into her face, his pulses tingling at the welcoming glance she threw.

"May I ?" he whispered, halting half incredulous.

"It will be quite like old times," she smiled, "and I don't deserve it."

"Deserve it ! My presence—mine !" he cried out. "Miss Ramsden——"

"Wait. I have been a brute—a——" came from her clenched teeth.

"Hush ! For God's sake don't malign my queen. It is I who have acted like a——"

She lifted her hand. "Stop !" she cried ; "you have no right to——"

"I know it," he flung out impetuously. "A commander in the Merchant Service has no right."

A sudden pause, a startled, timid glance, and Violet Ramsden with a face and neck flushing crimson in the eye of the cold white moon. Carragh stood in silence. Man-like he gripped the essentials and missed the context. How the sentence would have ended he did not know ; it was sufficient to his rather morbid self-consciousness that she had said he had no right. He attributed the pause to a natural diffidence to say the whole outright. But that had not been Violet's intention ; and now, wondering a little, very anxious to soothe and take away the sting so unwittingly used, she drew her cloak more closely about her, caught up one fluffy end of it, and pressed it to her cheeks ; then with an almost hopeless intonation, remarked, "I was going to say that I think even Captain Carragh has no right to paint himself in blacker colours than is necessary."

Across the strip of silvered sea lay the gunboat, haughtily pointing out her immeasurable superiority, her magnificent equipment, her conscious dignity in the world of ships ; on her decks, still prowling restlessly up and down, was the lieutenant-commander, an aristocrat of the sea, bronzed, well set up, a man with an undeniable position—but Carragh had already forgotten the stinging analogy ;

he stood face to face with the queen, who kissed where he had struck ; he saw the moonlight playing with her eyes, her full red lips, the dimples that came and went in those flushed and delicate cheeks ; saw that it laved them, softly accentuating the beauties, making ivory of the fair white skin.

The queen's hand rested on the rail ; a white and undeniably artistic hand with blue veins showing at the wrist. Carragh had a vague suspicion that it might be cold, and moving forward he took it, as once before he had taken it, in his own. He held it ; daring to examine the tapered fingers. The queen made no effort at withdrawal. She stood so still, so pale, with eyes so full of entreaty, that Carragh could scarcely have failed to gather an inkling, had he been cool. But he was not cool. His blood burned. Only the fact that she remained impassive held him.

"They tell me," he said with an intense effort to speak sanely, "that you are going away to-morrow. I can't believe it. Is it true? Are you?"

The queen lifted her eyes to his ; the moonlight pointed out their depth, their luminosity, their wonderful faculty of speech, but her voice only said, smiling, "I have no reason to remain now. You have supplanted me. . . . I shall be the laughing-stock of the four continents, you know."

The phrase struck home. It was his own, spoken on that wonderful day when they met face to face in the Thames, and Lady Barraclough badgered him. Instantly he replied—

"Does that matter? . . . Does anything the continents can say matter to either of us? I beg your pardon. I forgot."

"Forgot?" she whispered.

"Myself," he put in, cognisant of the fact that he held her hand, that he desired to kiss it, to shield it, and yet that they were apart, practically strangers. "I had no right to couple our—interests in that fashion," he blurted, cursing his odd perversity. "I am Captain Carragh, a sailor, tied to the sea, a rover of the modern type ; you are Miss Ramsden. What right have I to dream——"

"And in addition," she said banteringly, noting the pause, "I might jeopardise your career. You recollect?"

"Is that important?" he cried out, stumbling heavily, making ruts where all was plain and smooth.

"They are your own words," she returned, smiling now. "Mayn't I use them, or is it no longer important?"

Carragh released her hand.

"A fig for my career!" he broke in, with a gust of passion. "If you are going, my career goes too; I want none. If you have the heart to tell me, now, that you are going I shall end it all and go out West, East—anywhere where a man may do something better than ferry idiotic passengers up and down the seaboard and wait for a collision to give him his quietus. I have had enough tramping, enough mail-boating, enough of the two R decoration—tell me, now, what will you do? . . . tell me—or is it necessary for your sake? Do you want to cut this knot? Are you tired of it? Oh, my queen, my queen! You will think me mad! You will think me——"

The queen's white hand moved out and rested on his shoulder, and her soft voice fell on his ears like a caress.

"How horribly difficult you make it," she whispered. "I didn't know that you particularly wished me to—to stay."

Carragh lifted his eyes and caught her glance, quiet, luminous, full of tenderness and appeal, and in a moment he was beside her, drawing her to him, holding her, breathless.

"I can say nothing," he cried out, "only stay—don't go! For God's sake, don't go away and leave me again! . . . Don't! don't! I love you . . . I have always loved you! I have no thought but for your happiness! . . . What can I say?"

"Say? Say nothing, Paddy—only kiss me," came softly from the sweet red lips.

CHAPTER XXVII

EXEUNT THE NAVIGATORS, ENTER THE EARL

A MAN who stands the accepted lover of a woman he has long despaired of winning does not view the trivialities of life with the eye of a cynic. He sees matter for laughter in the queer idiosyncrasies of poor human nature ; subjects for delight in the details of his duty ; matter for congratulation in the veriest commonplace.

The queen frowns. Life is black, the clouds foretell rain, the barometer an east wind. Trifles irritate, the quip is a profound and wicked sarcasm, intentionally delivered ; but if the queen smiles these phases all become indications of fine weather, warmth, and sunshine ; therefore, O queens of this world, smile always, but give your favours discreetly, for on you, more than all else, depends the demeanour of man to his brother.

Carragh did not sleep heavily that night of nights. He was up, as we say, with the lark, fresh from a tub prepared by Sammy, and a most excellent dish of tea taken in the glow and cool beauty of a morning such as England delights in, as a specimen.

The upper decks were already washed, the men engaged in squeegeeing and polishing brasswork. An officer walked the bridge barefoot, and dabbled in the wettest corners, sipping comfortably at his tea. Carragh glanced up and acknowledged his salute. "A brilliant day," he remarked, and passed on with a smile. "A capital morning for Azimuths."

The officer was Toby Slade, the eminent banjoist and jingler of rhymes, a person who, three weeks ago, had been anathema to the autocrat, and now daily might be seen talking with her, and sometimes venturing on a joke.

He accepted the commander's suggestion, and Carragh moved down the deck proud as a boy jingling newly-won marbles. The man with the nubbly brow met him and saluted; Carragh acknowledged it. Even the sea-lawyer failed to ruffle him, a fact he of the nubbly brow quickly remarked to his chum, as they bent together drying the paintwork.

"The old man's like a cat on 'ot bricks this mornin'," said he; "seems to me he's seen a ghost."

"Main pretty one, then," his friend decided.

It was—but the hit was by hazard.

Six o'clock. The Sound sparkling in glorious sunshine; the town lifting spires and turrets through a fleeting mist; Mount Edgumbe purple at the head, veiled at the base; the Barbican peeping, Mount Batten swathed, the Hoe still sunk in sleep; and everywhere in the foreground ships—ships—ships.

Piers crept out from the nebulous shore, reaching long arms into the shining water; gulls swept in circles under the sterns of vessels busily engaged in preening their wings. Bells sounded—the sharp ting-ting of the merchantman, the ringing tong-tong of the liners, and the hollow cadence of the man-o'-war. On the *Southern Cross* the thud of a donkey-pump beat rhythmically, as though it were her heart, and the hiss of water swishing on the lower deck came up to Carragh as he walked.

The gunboat lying so close at hand no longer troubled him. The rust on her sides looked picturesque, gave colour to her sombre level of greyness. The admiral might have been dead, the signalmen a force unheard of—all was so still, so serenely placid in the beautiful bay.

A collier came down from the distant piers, her scuppers spouting blackened water, the grime and rust of twelve months' money-spinning for some Jew sweater, rank amidst the barnacles. She swam high by the nose, with a small list to starboard showing her iron-bound decks, her meagre crew, and the paltry equipment by which they governed her. She passed out by the breakwater, hooting on her whistle like a dismal beast led to the slaughter-house, and the naked Channel received her in its throat.

Seven o'clock. Hah! Mount Batten peeping, the Hoe

breaking away from those clinging mists, the piers more sinuous, greedily stretching arms towards the busy shipping. Dots beside them now—dots carrying men and bales of goods for the unappeased maw of the ships. The town a place of growing chimneys, all cock-a-hoop, with smoke rising straight and blue against the haze. Seven o'clock, some letters to write, some orders to give, and at eight, these matters accomplished, a new sound on the stillness as Carragh came once more from his room.

T-s-s-s-s-e! Pressure on the hydraulic crane, the rush of water in pipes, and a solemn package of trunks and bags ascending in a sling from the baggage-room. Carragh crossed over and stood watching. Three ladies passed up the saloon stairs and did the same. They stood a little apart, clad for a journey—Miss Guffles, Miss Roberts, and the missionary girl—until Carragh moved over to join them.

"I am sorry to see this," he said, pointing to the evidence of departure.

Miss Guffles looked up, and was about to reply when the missionary girl said, in her lugubrious intonation—

"I think it hardly necessary to make capital of our failure."

Carragh, a little annoyed despite the brilliant outlook, answered swiftly, "I did not know you regarded it as failure."

"Neither do we so regard it," came the retort discourteous, "but apparently you do."

"No, no," said Miss Guffles, roused to defend the cloth at this most uncalled-for attack. "That is not fair. Captain Carragh is a gentleman. He would not insinuate as you suggest."

"A gentleman?" said the hollow voice. "That is a person who does nothing—I believe?"

The two ladies drew back somewhat; neither made any answer; it was evident they wished to disclaim the missionary girl.

"I do not know," she went on undismayed, "whether that may be a captain's occupation, but in my country a person who does nothing is called a larrikin, and when we catch him we send him to a penitentiary."

Carragh scarcely knew whether to speak or to remain

silent ; whether to laugh or to be angry ; and before he had decided, the lugubrious voice was engaged in battle with the bo'sun's mate, who stood by the hatchway receiving the baggage.

"Be exceedingly careful of those trunks," she ordered. "They are my trunks. No other trunks would replace them."

"Aye, aye, miss," said the bo'sun's mate—"leastways, sir, that is."

"My name is Alicia Jason," cried the missionary girl, firing the words with deliberate scorn, "and the only navigation I know anything about takes people to heaven."

"Very good, miss," said the bo'sun's mate, "I'll see to it." But he referred to the trunks.

"I require no handle to my name," said the missionary girl in a rising monotone. "In heaven there are no handles. Only man has a handle. It panders to his vanity. He is inordinately vain."

The bo'sun's mate tilted his cap sideways, scratching his head, and gave the order to lower away.

"Gently does it, ye silly flamingoes !" he cried ; "don't ye hear the lady's orders ?"

"A flamingo is a bird," said the voice of the missionary girl, while Carragh moved away to hide his laughter ; "that man is not a bird ! For a bird has no soul, and that man has a soul—although he is a man."

"Mates," said the man over the hatchway, "there's goin' to be a bloomin' racket if ye ain't careful wi' them trunks—the sky-pilot says so."

But Carragh was out of hearing. He dared not face these tragic tones. He stood looking over the side, and saw that on every hand was sunshine and rippling water ; the Sound flooded with colour, the heavens blue, immense, screening the earth with its changing cloak. Up there the sun-god shed beams of mellow light, warming the fields, the rocks ; it fell softly on the sheep and cattle straying down the green hillsides ; it whelmed the town, the docks, the ships—giving them life and energy, and bidding men recognise the beauty of things evolved through the ages by its power.

Carragh rejoined the ladies. It seemed absurd to attempt to refute either the insolence or the bigotry of a

creed so appallingly sombre : he could only shrug his shoulders and question as he had questioned before.

"Mad?"

And as before the answer fell on his ears, "Oh dear no—but exceedingly conscientious."

Noon, and a tender alongside snorting steam from an escape that gurgled like an angry man. On her decks the stacked luggage of those who were leaving, and the missionary girl in defiant attitude on the gangway. But no one heeded her. Miss Guffles and her friend had reported the unnecessary rudeness, and her companions shrugged shoulders and said they were glad she was going. Sadie Cole and Lady Barraclough went so far as to try to make her withdraw her remarks, but the missionary girl was not to be cajoled.

"They were honest opinions. I never withdraw honest opinions when I am sure they are honest. My conscience will not allow me to pander to an official because he is an official."

After that Mrs. Cole felt there was nothing further to be said, so she found Violet and sent her to commiserate with Carragh, a feat she accomplished to such purpose that by the time the tender was ready to leave the ship he actually contemplated a visit to her decks to shake hands and be friends. But from this "madness" Miss Violet wisely restrained him. She knew the missionary girl, Carragh did not.

Of course, as Lady Barraclough stated afterwards, there were tears, protestations, and all the feminine batteries in full working order at the first flap of the paddles. That was only to be expected in such circumstances, and if the truth is to be told, Lady Barraclough might have been seen by any inquisitive person using her nose and a handkerchief bugle-wise—a mannish trick that set the dog on the vanishing tender barking as though he considered the noise in the nature of a personal affront. But Carragh walking the deck in the new security and sunshine, was not prepared to take up the cudgels in defence of any one at that moment. The matter that appealed to him and to the dainty vision walking beside him, was the very pertinent query, given for the hundredth time, so said the lady, of —

"Well, and what are we going to do?"

And Miss Violet answered demurely, "I have said—I have said—we are going to take a trip."

"Precisely. I know—but when?"

"To-morrow—the day after—next week . . . what a hurry you are in."

"Of course. I want to end it and get home. I have so much to do before we can——"

"And we have oceans of time."

"My dear, that isn't true."

"Paddy! You know I couldn't tell a lie."

"Sweet little George Washington!" said Carragh, and at this time-honoured quip they both laughed. Conceive it!

But the laughter ended with the advent of a third promenader—one who took them at a disadvantage, coming from behind the smoke-room. She paused a moment, lifting her hands, then in a tone which would have been quite unrecognised a month ago, the autocrat said, "Where is one to go?" and paused, blankly staring.

"To go?" Miss Ramsden questioned, appallingly cool, despite her flushing cheeks. "What do you mean, dear?"

Lady Barraclough crossed over and joined them. "If you don't mind, Captain Carragh, I will walk a little with you—you and Violet. I wish to say a word—but, oh dear me! the other side of the deck took my breath away."

"Why?" Carragh asked.

"Need one go into details?" Lady Barraclough threw out despairingly. Then in a tragic voice, "Macaulay was right; but I venture to suggest that even Macaulay would stand amazed at the rapidity of our progress. Turn her homeward, Captain Carragh—turn her homeward before you bring any more suffering on a well-intentioned woman. I give you my word, I trembled when I saw you two meet, but—well, I am glad you did not resign. I am glad, Violet, your strong common sense prevailed."

She paced slowly beside them, dangling her ungainly arms, her brow pushed forward, her eyes piercing the distance.

"There was a day," she went on after a moment, "when one believed in love; when it appeared as the one

sound basis on which to build one's hopes for the future—the one thing possible to give peace ; and there was a day when one learned to sneer at love, when it appeared as the degraded preliminary to madness, the appalling beginning of a life-long anguish. But these are passed, and there has come a time when, looking actualities straight in the face, one is prepared to revert to the first thesis—childhood and age, you see ; childhood and age—the time for impressions, the time for judgment ; and so I say now, to you both, go on loving ; love wisely, love strenuously, love always. It is to that that I have come to-day.”

She stood a minute quite still, lifting her hands towards her friend. “Violet !” she cried out. “What shall I say ? Can I say anything that shall make you happier than you are ? . . . Can I ?”

The two paused, looking into each other's eyes, gripping each other shoulder-high with arms outstretched, Violet smiling and shaking her head ; Lady Barraclough smiling too, but very straight of lip. “Can I ?” she echoed again, and again the assertive negation—“Nothing.”

Lady Barraclough remained a moment without speech. Her eyes were very luminous, an almost wistful expression dawned in the sad, thinking face, and when at length she spoke, her voice rang with a certain harshness ; but the words she said were, “God bless you, my dear . . . aye, both of you,” then fell to pacing as before. They passed up the deck facing the glinting Channel ; down it, searching out details of the town nestling so cosily in the arms of the bay—but for a space they walked in silence.

Four p.m., and once more a tender bobbing beside the anchored yacht. On her decks three men clad in tweeds ; a little apart, three servants and a pile of baggage.

Stuart Walton stood on the gangway platform, and clustered in a group just inside the rail were Lady Barraclough, Violet Ramsden, Sadie Cole, Captain Carragh, and the ship's officers. The bo'sun, glowering through an open side port on the lower deck, ruled his men with biting speech. His voice came up in broken sentences—

“Cork fender there, Jarvis . . . Chaffinch ! clear away them slings. . . . Lower that after-tackle a hand. . . . Move yourselves ! Look as though t'were duff an' you 'ad first snick. . . . Now then, Paltry ! keep your ugly

nose out of the daylight, or the gulls will be taking it for a lump o' pork——"

There was laughter, discreetly veiled, on the lower deck as Paltry withdrew from this risk; and a moment later, the gangway having been properly levelled, a tall, grey-bearded man came up the steps and lifted his cap.

"Day to you, ladies," he ejaculated, moving stiffly to meet Lady Barraclough. "Hah! All well, Honoria? Precious glad to see you safely anchored. Had visions of shipwreck and incidental terrors ever since you left. Yes, I am glad to see you."

"Ah, Mrs. Cole, Violet, Miss Collins, Miss Granger, how d'ye do? how d'ye do? This is pleasant—very pleasant" . . . He passed down the line shaking hands with his friends until he reached the group of officers. Here he paused, raised his cap in acknowledgment of their salute, and faced the commander.

"Captain Carragh, I believe?" he said, a humorous twinkle creeping into his fine eyes. "My name is Stafferly; perhaps you have heard of me, as I have heard of you—eh, what?"

Carragh admitted the fact, and they turned up the deck together, walking away from the group at the gangway.

"Quite so," said the earl. "You could hardly have commanded the *Southern Cross* without coming across my name at some time."

"Nor could I have seen the papers, Lord Stafferly," Carragh put in, smiling.

"True, true. One gets one's fair share of public attention—public pillorying is perhaps the more correct term; but that is a necessity of office. It ceases to attract after the lapse of a session, and one turn's one's mind to a collection of those inspired productions people call caricatures. They are interesting. But speaking of the papers reminds me—you have figured rather largely of late."

"I, Lord Stafferly?"

"Well, perhaps I should say the commander and officers of the *Southern Cross*, who, so said the papers, were Lady Barraclough and her navigating friends; but who, so said my sister, were Captain Carragh and his officers. Whence comes the divergence?—can you give me an inkling?"

"I haven't the faintest notion," Carragh answered.

"And which is the authentic record—Lady Barraclough's or the papers'?"

"Oh, I have no doubt Lady Barraclough has put the matter most kindly for us, but——"

"My sister objects to injustice, captain," said the earl with a dry smile. "You will be compelled to take the consequences."

"If it will afford Lady Barraclough any pleasure, you may be sure that both my officers, who had to do this thing, and I, who had merely to give orders, will be very glad."

"Hum!" said the earl; "but it is the giving of orders that is the first necessity in these matters."

They reached the end of the promenade, and Carragh made a step to return, but his lordship had other views. He desired to see the harbour from the other side of the deck, and approached the far rail. Here he halted, leaning with his back to the light, and searching Carragh with his keen eyes.

"Do you know," he said in a tone that reminded his companion strongly of Lady Barraclough, "that your name is a very familiar one to me from other reasons than those I have touched upon?"

Carragh, with a queer premonition, drew instinctively within himself, and replied that it was possible, seeing the name was fairly common.

"I don't agree, captain. In Ireland it may be so, but the English Carraghs are rather exclusive, and, pardon a remark that may savour of—of the newspapers—you bear a strong facial resemblance to the head of them. In point of fact you are exceedingly like Sir Walter Carragh, who is a very old friend of mine and a Member of the House of Commons. I wonder, now——"

Carragh broke in without further hesitation at this, saying rather stiffly, "Sir Walter is my father, my lord, but I have not seen him since I was a boy."

The Earl of Stafferly leaned forward a trifle and said, "No; but he has seen you." And again, as Carragh made no reply, "What an extraordinary coincidence!"

"I am afraid I don't follow you, Lord Stafferly," Carragh returned, still very stiff and uncompromising.

"What, the resemblance or the fact?"

"Either, at the moment, seems a trifle unimportant."

"Not at all—not at all," said the earl with a recurrence of that shrewd twinkle; "but, on the other hand, of great importance—to you. For, to put the matter in a nutshell, if I do not greatly misjudge the time we have been together, Sir Walter Carragh should have made his bow by this, and I think it highly probable he is looking for you."

Carragh drew a pace nearer, his face white, his manner strained.

"Am I to understand, my lord, that my father is on board this ship?"

"I expressed myself very badly, sir, if I did not convey that meaning."

"And that he knew—that I commanded her?"

Lord Stafferly moved from his position against the rail, and laid one hand lightly on his companion's arm.

"I think," he said, smiling, "there can be no manner of doubt on that head. Go and ask him—also, if I may presume to give advice; take him gently."

And the earl passed up the deck to rejoin his friends.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SIR WALTER CARRAGH, K.C., M.P.

THERE was but little doubt as to Sir Walter's intention, for the commander had barely had time to assimilate the news before Wo-sun appeared clucking, serious of face and very indignant.

"Seh," he said, "ole man, number one kine, come in cabin, makee look-see. 'Hah, you boy,' say to me, 'where Capin Callagh?' I say, 'Don' know, seh.' He say, 'Don' know—what that? Go fine him.' I say, 'No can do, seh—leave cabin all alone one time—you come stay?' He say, 'Yes, be damn to you!' He go up an' down loom—lookkee pickers, lookkee book . . . lookkee everyting got—say, 'Hum! Capin Callagh seem in clober . . . hum! . . . haw! . . . hum!'"

Sammy paused for breath, looking anxiously at his commander, but there was no anger in Carragh's face. He smiled.

"Same old game," he said half aloud. "Poor old chap!" Then, turning to the boy, "Well, I will go and see him. What did he do after that?"

"Come back me, seh—say, 'Hi! you boy—no gone away one time?' I say, 'No, seh—capin leave me look-see no tief come lob pickers—books,' I say."

"Cha! and what did he do then?"

"Lun at me, seh. Dlive me out. 'Huh! huh! huh!—go quick, damn boy,' he say, 'find Capin Callagh—say old man come see him;' then I come," Sammy concluded with a touch of remorse, "because no big enough makee fight."

"No," said Carragh with a passing smile—"no, I suppose not." Then, instantly serious again, "Never

mind. That gentleman is my father. Be civil to him, savvy?"

"Yes, seh."

"And now don't let any one come in—understand?"

"Yes, seh."

Carragh turned and walked to the door, opened it, and entered.

"*Tu-ne-ah-ma!*" said Sammy with emphasis as he mounted guard. "Capin no laugh. That bad."

Inside the room the two men met in silence—Carragh crossing swiftly over, the old man advancing to greet him. He was short, sturdy, clean-shaven, and had the eye of a hawk, straight, thin lips, and heavy brow. He was one of the first lawyers of the day, and knew it—a man with a will as inflexible as his features. They faced each other, but Sir Walter did not extend his hand, nor make any effort to be friendly; he searched his son's attitude.

"Well," he said harshly, after a biting pause, "tired of cruising?"

"Getting tired, sir," Carragh rejoined.

"Hum! It has taken you a long while."

"About seventeen years—yes, a good slice out of one's life."

There was a pause. The two men took notes, made mental assertions as to the qualifications of the other. Then Sir Walter jerked out—

"You might have been an admiral by now, if you hadn't been a young—jackanapes."

"Captain, perhaps . . . I'm not fifty yet, you see," Carragh smiled.

"No, sir," the old man asserted, "admiral—rear, vice—something definite—instead of . . . seventeen years—pish! what is it you are?"

"Master of the *R.M.S. Southern Cross*, at present a yacht and in the service of Lady Barraclough."

Sir Walter fumed up and down the narrow cabin.

"*R.M.S. Southern Cross!*" he ejaculated. "*R.M.S. Moonshine! R.M.S. Fiddlestick!* Master, too . . . hum! Glad you acknowledge that. Glad you aren't puffed to the eyes at your success. Master—yes, that is your title . . . and you might have been admiral. Pish! Extraordinary thing you couldn't see which side your bread

was buttered. . . . Why couldn't you see it? . . . Why couldn't you see it? . . ."

He paused, a trifle shaken, his eyes searching for defects in speech or habit, and finding none—finding in the place of either a well-strung man, sinewy, virile, full of fight, with an accent as perfect as his own. "Why couldn't you?" he threw out again, almost in despair at the silence.

"I was very young, sir," Carragh put in, holding very firmly to his dignity, but with a voice that hinted at softness despite his attitude. "I suppose young people rarely have old heads on their shoulders."

"A man who wishes to succeed," Sir Walter snapped, coming nearer and speaking with the clear, incisive strokes of a master, "has a head from the beginning, and at fifteen he uses his judgment. A man who intends to climb never misses a chance, never misreads a signal, never slips away from the side of those who can push him. You take me? I could have pushed you. You were my son—and now you are my only son—you hear, sir? Yet you chose to slip away, to stand on your—confounded dignity and go to the devil on your own particular track. Why? Tell me that—why?"

He stopped speaking, rather red of face and damp under the hard line of grey hair lying across his forehead, but his eyes showed no sign, and his lips were straight as at the beginning of this interview. "Well," he repeated, "have you any answer—or is there none?"

"Because I was a young fool, sir," Carragh blurted. "I don't know of any other explanation."

"Huh!" said Sir Walter, and commenced to walk up and down the room again, his hands clasped behind him. "Huh!" He turned and glanced sharply from under his bent brows, and said once more, "Huh!" Then, after a further turn, "Now, why the devil couldn't you have said that seventeen years ago?"

Carragh leaned with his elbow on the oaken cabinet, searching his memory for the reasons. He saw them. Every action, every intonation of that voice was that of the father who had sent him to do as he willed in the day of his disgrace, years ago. He remembered the taunt, the hard tones, the biting sentences—"Sent down, eh? The *Britannia* not good enough for you, I suppose? Very

well. If this is final and irrevocable, I have done with you—understand ? ”

The words sounded in ears that had listened to them in the darkness, in sunlight, in gales, in calms, in fine weather when the moon was up, and he stared at the scintillating wavelets from his post on the poop of that old, old sailing ship which had taken him away from the possibility of hearing them dinned. And so all down the years they had echoed, but never more strenuously than of late, never with such emphasis.

Something of what passed in Carragh's mind was reflected in his face, for he had not the gift of unchanging feature so noticeable in Sir Walter. The elder man saw it, halted in his walk, glanced back over his shoulder, and once more came forward.

“Why couldn't you have said that seventeen years ago ? ” he questioned again, but with a subtle inflexion in the cold, iron voice. “Why ? ”

And Carragh could only emphasise his rejoinder—

“Because, sir, I was a fool.”

He added, after a momentary hesitation, as the thought of Lord Stafferly's advice came back to him, “I don't know that I can put it more plainly. One learns these things with time. You gave me that—seventeen years. And, looking back across that space, I can only see foolishness—idiocy, if you like—but I can also remember the childish outlook, a fact no space of time can blur.”

“Huh ! ” said Sir Walter grimly. “Extenuating circumstances, eh ? ”

“I have no desire to put it in that light, sir. The thing was an escapade. I don't defend it. I merely place the facts as they appear to me now.”

“But you admit you were a fool, eh ? You admit that ? ”

“A man does not force his way to the top of a ladder without learning to understand the difficulties of the early steps, or the foolishness that prevented him climbing the longer ladder. This perch of mine was not an easy one to reach alone. There have been many slips. Once or twice I have dangled, in a sense, by the arms ; still, I climbed, and, such as it is, I reached the top ; and now I am there I am sick of it. But,” he continued in rapid tones, “you have come a long way to meet me. I recognise that, for I know the difference between my position

and the position you had planned for me; and if any words of mine can soften my attitude, if anything I can say will help to heal a breach I feel very deeply, I am willing and eager to say them."

As Carragh spoke, Sir Walter paused more than once in his walk, glancing up, tossing his head, and uttering short grunts of acquiescence. Now, as his son ceased, he came back and, standing motionless, questioned—

"Are you prepared to throw this thing up?"

"What else can I do?"

"Enter Parliament."

Carragh drew back a pace, his eyes glowing. "Me!" he exclaimed. "But I know nothing of politics."

"Then you will have the less to unlearn," came from Sir Walter's straight lips. "Will you take *this* chance?"

"I will take any chance you advise, sir."

"Very well—sit down and write your resignation."

"Now?"

"At once, please."

Carragh made no ado, but crossed to the table and obeyed. Sir Walter stood grimly watching, and when his son rose with the letter, took it and glanced it over.

"Huh!" he said. "To the point. Yes—they would not hesitate to give you the same—if it became expedient. Yes, that will do."

He replaced it in the envelope, tucked it in his pocket-book, and buttoned his coat upon it. "Now," he said, "We can talk at our ease—shake hands, my boy . . . shake hands."

Underlying the harsh intonation, behind that hard, cold face, forces were throbbing for utterance; but only a vista of their intensity was to be gleaned, and that solely from the jerky sentences which fell as they stood with hands gripped.

"I have been an ass," said Carragh.

"Of course you have . . . and so have I—and be damned to it," came from Sir Walter's unmoved lips.

"And now let us go and see the lady."

CHAPTER XXIX

CROSSING THE TRACK

A STEAM launch picnic up the glorious Tamar ; a day occupied by a visit to Lord Mount Edgcumbe, and another spent in part on board, in part on the flagship, gaining a further insight into the characteristics of the sturdy sailor at whose orders torpedo-boats raced down the harbour, destroyers pelted into the shimmering blue, lights winked and signals fluttered, brought the *Southern Cross* to the end of her stay in Plymouth.

And now on the 1st of September, in the freshness of an early dawn, she stole out past the Breakwater and, with newly-tested chronometers snug in their case, broke away for her final run to the Mediterranean.

They threaded a maze of fishing-boats lying with flapping sails waiting for the breeze which should take them home ; drew down to Eddystone, slowed and put their pilot into the cockle-shell sent to receive him, passed the gaunt watch-tower of our south-western coast with its stumpy predecessor lying shorn beside it, and entered the peopled Channel. It is a street, this highway of ours, a street of modern times full of blundering ne'er-do-wells elbowing rudely the gentlemanly liners, the aristocratic fighters, and all the faster world of ships. It is crammed in certain pathways as are the side-walks of a city ; crammed with people who lounge, people who hurry, people who are careless, who are criminally negligent ; people sometimes clad in rags, sometimes in furbelows—and there are people, too, who stand and stare blear-eyed at what is passing. It is the border-land of our pushful island, and thronged with those who have made it and kept it free ; it is the throat of the immenser

ocean, and down it go at all times, in gale or calm, in fog, snow, or driving rain, the messengers from other shores carrying wealth to England.

We see it from our cliffs, lying in serrated lines of green and purple under the storm-clouds ; scintillating in a breeze, foam-capped, blue, translucent ; we see it at night speckled with moving lights—picturesque, fairy-like ; or, again, when the mists oppress us, lying veiled and sad, echoing with the cries of those children who move upon its surface, far, far out, and strive to make their presence known—like children, with little tin trumpets and cheeks puffed out with effort.

But the haze that looks so dreamy from the cliffs is a peril to those who drive post-haste into the thick of it ; the lines of colour so loved by painters have other meanings than those of simple shadows ; they mark an unseen and nearly incalculable force, moon-driven ; they are formed by gales raging deep in the heart of the Atlantic ; they are the result of inequalities of the ocean-bed. No one can gauge their movement, swiftness, accurately—they may guess, they may use tide-tables, consult charts, and fill reams with calculations ; but on the man in a hurry, accident waits. And in these days who of us is not in a hurry ? It is part of the law of being ; an offshoot of that greater law governing all mankind—the survival of the fittest.

Something of all this was in Carragh's mind as he stood at the wing of the bridge and stared at the gaunt lighthouse rising off those slimy rocks as the yacht dashed past, going full speed for the open. How often he had looked for it ; how often, too, had it happened that, just as he was about to order slower speed, a gleam of its light winking on the sea-rim had appeared to tell him that his "landfall" was not without merit. Now he was passing it, perhaps, for the last time ; certainly the last as commander of a mailship ; for had he not "signed articles" for a calling the beginning and end of which stretched out amazingly into the clouds ? It was like saying goodbye to an old friend on the edge of a wilderness, and looking for characteristics in the face of the new.

But he was not left to dream of further climbing. Peter Lovatt approached him and said, "S. 53 W., sir,"

in that tone which demands a reply, and Carragh gave it. "Yes, put her so, and test for error."

Eddystone was passed. It loomed tall and white against the coast-line haze, and fifteen minutes later had sunk altogether out of sight. The ship had entered a stratum of walled-in fog; a space narrowed down to a small circle, never more than a mile in diameter, which travelled with them. In the centre, where they sped, the sunlight gleamed upon the tiny wavelets, showing a surface nearly smooth and dappled by touches of the softest emerald; and all about, clinging to them as though they carried it, was a thin white haze, veiling the horizon, isolating them from the world at large.

As a study in colour it was wonderfully effective; but, as Carragh knew, here the first necessity for navigation is clear, wind-swept space, and colour is relegated to the background. For were they not crossing the ebb and flow of Channel traffic, the westward and eastward bound of all nations? Was it not the hour of subtle surprises, and, if continued till night—danger?

The commander moved up and down the bridge staring at the evidences of fog, the *bête noire* of all navigators. He looked up as he passed the officer of the watch and said, "Double the look-out, there, Lovatt," and continued his march.

Eight o'clock, and with it a deepening of the border line mist and a charming face on the promenade glancing up to smile and woo him from his post. But Carragh knew his environment and shook his head. "Can't, just now," he cried out.

"Why, there is nothing in sight," Miss Violet's lips announced, while her eyes flashed, "Do—do!"

"Not at the moment—but the horizon is not a mile distant. Come up here and bring Lord Stafferly."

They joined him at once, and standing behind the screen looked out upon the dancing wavelets. As the sun rose so the mist deepened. Overhead the sky remained blue and only thinly veiled. The mist streamed past them, wet, like steam; the gulls swept out of it, curved, vanished, eyeing the wake with eyes alert for scraps; they cried out to each other, turning somersaults, fighting—then suddenly there came from the heart of the mist a small and wistful gasp, like the cry of a gull with a brazen throat—"Waugh—waugh!"

"Curious sound," said Lord Stafferly. "What is it?"

Carragh barely raised his eyes. "A sailing vessel on the starboard tack. She probably hears our propellers." He looked across at Lovatt, "Ring 'stand by,'" he ordered; and a minute later, "Half speed!"

"So near as that!" said Miss Ramsden. "Why, where is she?"

"Perhaps half a mile up there," Carragh responded, "perhaps the same distance down there—anywhere within that radius. No, don't look at the horizon, look for her sails high up. Quartermaster, touch our siren—one long note."

The man pulled the cord, and the instrument ran up the scale with a barbarous yell that ended in an incredible pitch of shrillness.

"See anything there, Lovatt?" Carragh questioned.

"Nothing, sir."

"Hum! Slow."

The gong pealed and in less than a minute a noticeable change came over the throbbing ship. She stole along without a sound, the propellers no longer pounded, the vibration was scarcely apparent. Then into the silence there came once more that illusive signal, "Waugh—waugh!" and the people craned their necks to see. They found only the mist, the ring of blue sky, and the dappled emerald waters.

Carragh leaned towards Lord Stafferly and said, "I should like Sir Thomas up here for half an hour, if you will send for him."

"Good. Capital notion. Got a messenger on hand?"

Carragh beckoned the quartermaster, and five minutes later the right honourable gentleman who presides over the destinies of ships, wrecks, labour, fisheries, roads, railways, commerce, and some other inconsiderable trifles, was on the bridge of the *Southern Cross* grumbling at his friend.

"Look here," he said jokingly, "I did not bargain for this. What have you done with the weather, Captain Carragh?"

"That is what we are all asking," laughed Lord Stafferly.

"Waugh—waugh!" said the unseen vessel, feebly

coughing her whereabouts—and again—"Waugh—waugh!"

"What is that noise?" asked Sir Thomas, suddenly serious.

"Ship—saying her prayers," Carragh replied.

"Ship, eh—where?"

"That is more than her signal tells us. She can only grunt out three suggestions, you know, Sir Thomas, and they are rather illusive—quartermaster! sound the whistle."

Again the siren shouted excruciatingly and again, after a short space, came the weird—"Waugh—waugh!" like the cough of a sheep with a cold in its head.

"Confounded bad signal," said Lord Stafferly. "Hatherly, we shall have to wake up those inspectors of yours, or we shall be getting into trouble with the papers."

"Bother the papers," said Sir Thomas, laughing. "I don't think of them."

"Listen!" Carragh interjected, lifting his hand.

A voice came out of the mist crying in a hollow monotone, "Watch, there, watch!" and at intervals the warning was repeated, "Watch, there, watch!" in different and ludicrous intonations. It was as though a crowd of madmen jabbered in the fogginess, telling each other of approaching danger.

It was weird. Nothing was in sight, yet it was plain to those standing straining their eyes at the blank wall of mist, that the stranger was close, and that her crew were engaged in "heaving the lead," that they were using the old-time, Noah patent, "elbow-grease" sounding-machine on which Captain Cook and his coteremporaries relied. A splash echoed in the stillness after the last cry, then some one said, "Look out!" and into the haze a shadow stole, high up on the starboard bow, and Carragh moved swiftly to the wheelhouse.

"Full speed starboard, astern port engines. Helm hard a-starboard!" then after a moment, "See her, Lovatt?"

"Aye, sir—she's heading up Channel?"

"See her, see her?" echoed Sir Thomas, a trifle flustered at the sudden orders. "Where?"

"High up. Sails only," said the commander. "Right round with her, Lovatt, and come up under her stern."

A blue-grey spread of canvas towered broad on the starboard bow by this, and as the yacht swerved fast on her helm, the clang of blocks and the creak of ponderous yards came over the narrow strip of water to warn them how near they had been.

"Imagine that at night-time, Sir Thomas," Carragh remarked as they crossed the bridge.

"At night? Oh, but you would have seen her light."

"I doubt it."

"Then how would you have avoided her?"

"The odds are we should not have avoided her," Carragh announced abruptly; "we should have gone through her, Sir Thomas."

"It is a very difficult problem, Captain Carragh—a very difficult problem, this business of fog."

"True, sir. And in view of that fact I think our sound-signals require a little bringing up to date. Watch her, Lovatt, and ease the helm in time. We have no other guide, you see," he added, again turning to his companion.

"When we get you in the House, we will see what can be done," said Sir Thomas a trifle stiffly; "but you must remember that we have experts already."

They swept up to their old course; for a few minutes the shadow of sails vanished, then again, a little on the port bow this time, the rounded shapes grew dark, showed the wet creases, the dancing reef points, the tightened spilling lines, and all the delicate tracery of a full-rigged ship under lazily-whanging canvas, and as they drew abreast and slowed the engines to obtain a better view, a voice cried out very distinctly asking for the longitude. Peter Lovatt hurried into the chart-room to measure up, while Carragh, crossing to the wing of the bridge, hailed them with—

"What ship is that?"

"*Lorna Doone*," came the answer, "Frisco for Ham-burgh. What ship is that?"

"Yacht *Southern Cross*, outward for the Mediterranean. What passage have you had?"

"One hundred and eighty days, sir. N.E. trades from the line up, and now fog. Where do you make us out to be?"

"About eighteen miles sou'-west of Eddystone; but you shall have a correct position in a minute. Ah, here we are; give it to him, Lovatt."

And the second officer bellowed through hollowed hands—"49° 52' north, 4° 27' west. Eddystone bearing north 44° east, distant twenty-one miles."

"Thank you, sir ; thank you. Clear under the land by any chance ?"

"Quite, when we left. Anything else we can do for you ?"

"Nothing, unless you can lift this fog for us !"

"Hah ! By the way, that's a beast of a fog-horn you are using."

"Can't hear it, eh ? Well, sir, I guess it's a regulation trumpet, and we've got no other. Tune up there, for'ad—keep the music going ! So long, captain ! I wish I had your steam."

The ship faded away to the cry of her footy horn—"Waugh—waugh !" she coughed ; "waugh—waugh !" until the *Southern Cross* took up the note on her siren and drowned it. They moved more swiftly down the treacherous lane of fog.

For a space they crept along at half speed, with sudden pauses to listen, and heard the growing clamour in the stillness ; the clamour made by steamers bellowing on heavy whistles ; others shrieking with their sirens, and amidst them, thrown hastily into the gaps, as it were, the wheezy note of the sailing ships' trumpets, like the bleat of lonely sheep on the marshes.

Once or twice a grey shadow loomed up in the near distance ; the helm buzzed, and strange orders were snapped, and men moved with the alert action of unquestioned necessity, until again they were alone, and the ship could groan out her trouble to the surrounding mists. After a space a little fish-cutter, rusty, heavy with food for the British nation, and sunk deep by her stern-placed engines, came out of the haze with a fussy wave curling white about her stem, to interview them. The yacht swerved on her course to answer.

"Thick under the land, sir ?" came the query.

"Not when we left."

"Ah, then we'll get in. Port there, mister !" and in three minutes she had vanished, howling dismally on her hooter.

"She has to go," Carragh smiled in response to Sir Thomas's remark. "If her skipper dallies because of fog, he need not turn up next time her people sign on."

Then as they stood staring into the mist, a heavy booming came into the silence, and the *Southern Cross* responded on her siren—a single shriek. Again came the answering note—"H-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" a long-drawn howl, and Carragh turned to his friends. "An Atlantic liner," he remarked. "If our tracks coincide, as I fancy they will, we shall see how they break the record in foggy weather. Signal our engine-room to 'stand by.' Warn the crow's nest—anywhere on the starboard side," he ordered abruptly.

They pulsed slowly onward. It was long past the breakfast-hour, but Carragh would not leave the bridge, and the others seeing his determination, resolved to wait also. They stood in groups staring out into the mist, cognisant of the danger, watching the officers, and listening to orders. Lady Barraclough and Sir Walter Carragh had joined the party; but they all remained a little apart now lest they should obstruct the passage of the navigators. Suddenly a rocket burst high overhead, and Carragh pointed to the smoke balls descending through the thinner strata.

"A signal!" he said. "She is out there somewhere. Probably bound up Channel, and going full speed. Hist! Hear that?"

That was the thud of the propellers, water-borne to their ears, and a moment later came the deep-toned bellow of the steam hooter. Carragh approached the second officer, and they stood together examining the western fog. "She will be close," said the commander; "too confounded close for comfort. But whether she will pass ahead or astern is a problem. Siren there, quartermaster!"

Shriek, boom—shriek, boom! that was the order of things, and neither signal gave the remotest notion of how the signaller moved; whether east, west, north, or south; whether at full speed or at half speed, just two ear-splitting sounds—"H-o-u-g-f-f-f-f!" on the one side, "H-o-o-o-o-o!" on the other, and on either hand the bleating of frightened sheep, "B-a-a-a!" "W-a-h! wagh—wagh!" agitated at the knowledge of what was impending, or at all events of what was passing.

"H-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" the note boomed close, and in an instant Carragh sprang forward. "Full speed ahead! Full!" he accentuated, then, "Good God!"

The screws kicked out with a fine flurry of churned water, and the ship hung vibrant, gathering way; then with a dash, it seemed, she moved ahead.

The crow's nest tong-tonged, at the same moment, "Vessel broad abeam!" and the quartermaster, at a sign from Carragh, opened the siren valve.

The grim, black nose of an Atlantic greyhound broke out of the mist showing a curl of white at the forefoot. She came on with a growling rumble, the bow wave flashing emerald and white, her hooter muttering dully with the roar of an angry lion.

"Ho-o-o-o-o!" It was, as one might say, "Get out of the way before I hit you," and the *Southern Cross*, suddenly dwindled to a pigmy, flourished her propellers, struggling to obey.

But the great ship, if she moved swiftly, had also alert eyes, for she saw the yacht, understood how she moved, and with a deft touch, sheered slightly to the northward, and passed under the stern. She seemed to point scornfully to the fact of her monstrous power, to the delicate touch by which she could be manoeuvred, to the disdain she felt for all smaller fry. She approached in silent indifference, her funnels belching smoke and crusted with white, her decks thronged with people. A gong clashed high on her bridge. An officer approached the rail and looked over the screen; he signalled with his hand, and again a rocket flared to the zenith.

She made no sign, asked no questions, offered no advice, but passed foaming and vibrant through the mist, her port-holes, her brasswork, the whole castellated side of her for a minute aflame; then with a muttering growl slid into the fog—immense, throbbing, flashing rockets to warn men of her approach.

"Engines half speed!" said Carragh with grim brevity. "Sound our whistle, quartermaster!"

The *Southern Cross* passed onward like a dog fresh from the whip, his tail between his legs.

So, with alternate bursts of energy and silent, wistful pauses, they watched the time crawl until noon found them released from their nightmare and dashing away for the Bay over a sparkling and sunlit sea.

Lady Barraclough joined Carragh as he came at length from the bridge and held out her hand.

"Yes," she said, "I mean it. Many, many thanks to you and to everybody." Then, after a momentary pause, "What would have happened had we delayed three minutes longer by that ship?"

And Carragh's answer, given as he met her eyes, was, "God knows!"

CHAPTER XXX

DOWN THE SEAS

THEY entered the bay in some trepidation and discovered a pathway of blue, flecked with shadows, smooth as the proverbial millpond, and the promenaders revelled in the sparkling sunshine ; they walked and took their ease in long deck chairs with method.

It was Carragh's turn now to take life as he found it, and it cannot be suggested that he neglected his opportunities. When he was not with Violet—for there were others who sometimes claimed her attention—Lady Baraclough and her brother, or Sir Thomas Hatherly and stern-faced Sir Walter, were to be seen talking and walking with him. They discussed the problems of the future, the entry into Parliament through a pocket borough, the betterment of the Mercantile Marine, and a new Act by which to govern it. Sometimes, too, they played whist and smoked, when, in those gorgeous evenings after dinner and before the final good-night promenade dispersed them, they stared into the depth, and saw visions.

Villano, with its grim headlands and beetling, sea-worn sentinel rocks, cloud-clapped and barren ; Torinana, Finis-terre—the whole twenty-mile range of coast-line, badly lighted, pricked with wrecks, and suffering from the apathy of a stagnant civilisation, attracted them greatly. The rocks were so isolated, so sharp ; the mountains behind which they slept so massive, inaccessible ; the dangers they present to modern navigation so obvious that it scarcely needed the finger of their emancipated commander, a man just now throbbing with energy and hope, to point the singular unfitness of the lighting. Indeed, Sir Thomas deftly extinguished him when presently he

reached a higher flight, and denounced the Spanish Government.

"I see," he said, "you propose to keep us busy, Carragh. You won't allow us to sit down and rust, as your enemies the Dons appear to be rusting."

Then Lady Barraclough's voice broke upon the discussion with, "Oh, but something must be done, and done soon. Look at the Wreck Chart; mark the 'stars,' and remember the thousands who go each year. I rely upon Captain Carragh to wake you all up. I pray he may be a thorn in the side of apathy and dilettantism. I pray he may be able to place shipping on a higher level; that he may give it appliances by which it may be worked in comparative safety—a method of signalling adequate to its needs, and compel shipowners to adapt those safeguards which are in existence, but which at present are banned by the vulgar race for gold."

Sir Thomas looked up with a smile at his friend.

"Lady Barraclough," he said, "you and Stafferly have certainly conspired to bring the bees about our ears. I foresee that we shall be busy when your *protégé* makes his bow in the House."

"So, too, will the shipping interests," Lord Stafferly laughed. "But after all," he added with a quizzical glance at Sir Walter, "I think we may leave him to develop in the hands of our friend here."

"Better take Tommy's advice," flashed that astute lawyer, "and compensate him with the thanks of the nation for his gallantry—or was it heroism?—at the wreck. And," he finished dryly, "if he is likely to be very fresh, make him a member of the Gilded Chamber."

Lady Barraclough glanced up at the trio and said with her sarcastic inflection, "I didn't know that Captain Carragh had any interest in beer, nor that he dabbled at all in provisions; and as there isn't likely to be another jubilee for a while—why——"

"If my advice were asked in these matters," Lord Stafferly began.

"Oh, but it is not asked—it is not—and we know precisely what you would do if it were," said Lady Barraclough. "You would truckle. You all do."

"Even beer has its merits," quoth Sir Thomas dryly.

"My quarrel is that it appears to have all the merits,

Sir Thomas, judging from the dignity it has attained in the land."

"None of us here are brewers," Mrs. Cole put in with a humorous twinkle. "Come, let us slaughter them!"

"I would that we were. How easy and smooth is the pathway of the man of Vats to Parnassus," said Lord Stafferly.

"Besides, when you think of it," Sadie Cole flashed, "the majority can't rule. It takes money to rule, and therefore it is the bounden duty of the minority to acquire dollars and do the ruling. That's sense."

"Oh, but you are incorrigible," sighed Lady Barraclough.

"That's only a nice way of saying I can't be corrected," said Sadie with a smile. "Come, Lord Stafferly, you promised me a game of quoits—they are much more interesting than millionaires."

"That depends very much on the millionaire," said the earl as he turned to accompany her to the quoit-ground, "but we won't argue it out. We will play—best two out of three?"

"Good," said Mrs. Cole, "and I bet I win."

"Two to one you don't, Mrs. Cole."

"Done," said that lady.

Lady Barraclough left thus, turned to Sir Thomas and sighed.

"I am wondering," she said, "whether you will be able to help me in this matter of the wreck. Is it quite impossible to do anything for these men?"

"My dear Lady Barraclough, I think, if I may suggest it, I would allow the affair to take its own course. The papers, one or two of them, have made the necessary emendations, and I have no doubt that my Department will do what is usual in these cases. Lloyds, too, I think I may tell you, intend to——"

"Yes, yes, I know. But that is so old, so ineffective. Who requires watches in these days, or binoculars? Why, one may purchase them by monthly instalments, a most pernicious system, but I understand these are the recognised gifts?"

"Precisely," said Sir Thomas, seeing she awaited his confirmation. "And I believe they are generally much valued by the recipients."

"By some, yes. And by them, doubtless, placed under a glass case in the front parlour window for all the street to read the inscription. Don't you see, that sort of thing is not for these men—Carragh, Walton, and the rest. They don't require watches or inscriptions."

"I recognise the distinction you draw, but——"

"But the Board of Trade does not."

"Carragh," laughed Sir Thomas, "did we bargain for this kind of thing when we accepted Lady Barraclough's invitation?"

"Can't say I thought anything about it," said Sir Walter, "but at the moment I am rather interested to see how you are to pull yourself out of a hole."

"I decline to wriggle; I surrender," said Sir Thomas. "No, Lady Barraclough, the Board of Trade does not recognise any distinction; nor the necessity for any."

"But you do. Very well, why don't you initiate something. Create an Order; let it stand to the Merchant Service as the V.C. and D.S.O. stand to the Army and Navy. Is it impossible? I tell you these men are neglected. No one fights for them. No one organises them—they are split up, divided; the prey of the shark and crimp and greedy shipowner alike. If they behave ill, they receive their pay and their discharge; if they behave heroically, they receive their pay and their discharge, and perhaps, if they live long enough, they may receive a pat from officialdom—but it matters nothing. They are not lifted in the process. They have nothing tangible they can point to and wear on occasion, which shall be recognised by all who see it. Don't you think it possible to alter all this? Come, I won't tax you too much—I promise not to allude to the subject again, but now, while we are considering it, can you not give me some hope?"

Sir Thomas Hatherly's face was a study during this appeal. He had not bargained for it. It was evident that his jocular remark had a strong substratum of feeling, but it was evident also that he considered the matter one to be taken seriously. He squared his shoulders, leaning his elbows on the rail and said—

"I am sorry, very sorry, since I see you lay so much stress on it, but I can hold out no hope. These things must be initiated by His Majesty."

"But you have the ear of His Majesty, Sir Thomas."

"Within certain well-defined limits, yes. Why don't you put it to Stafferly?"

"Look," said Lady Barraclough; "that is why I do not put it to my brother."

She glanced towards the quoit-ground, whence merry peals of laughter announced his lordship's occupation.

"Hum!" said Sir Thomas. "Yes, they make a very pretty picture. No, I wouldn't bother Stafferly."

They all smiled, but in Lady Barraclough's face there was a shade of sadness also. She turned to her companions and said again, "Will you use *your* influence?"

"Obviously I can't," Sir Walter remarked.

"I suggest you pull other strings, Lady Barraclough," said Sir Thomas.

"There are others who have more influence than Hatherly or I, or even Stafferly," said Sir Walter gravely. "Come, let us join the quoit-players. They seem to be getting great sport out of a couple of sticks and a bit of twisted rope. And where, oh, where, is our gallant captain, that he does not come to swell the laughter?"

But Lady Barraclough made no secret of her indignation.

"The present truckling to money for money's sake is killing society. I, for one, will never join in the rush," she announced.

A fine night succeeded a fine day, and a small dance was arranged, at which Walton, Carragh, and Slade, to mention the most popular, revelled in the new-found sunshine. Lady Barraclough sat apart, watching rather grimly the flitting of Mrs. Cole about that grey, aristocratic lamp—the earl, her brother. She was not averse to the suggestion; but she remembered another scene on this same promenade, and was puzzled to know its meaning. Violet, sitting in a beflagged alcove out of the wind, and with Carragh by her side, thought of it also, but neither made any remark—the former because she considered it inopportune, the latter because she laughed and was happy.

Only one grievance was advanced in that gay scene, and little Lady Jane trotted it out for the benefit of Sir Walter Carragh. She regretted, still, not having reached Ulanda, but not so poignantly. The great lawyer met the

trouble with scant sympathy ; he said he hoped to have the pleasure of talking, or even, at a pinch, dancing with Lady Jane for some years to come, and that if he found her a bore and wished to get rid of her, he would certainly remember the Ulanda scheme. "It is a horrid climate," he accentuated, "an abominable country. Let the tulips go. Come, shall we help them with this set?"

Lady Jane acquiesced somewhat coldly, for the time for a new distraction was not yet. She pined in secret for the hillside, the dear cultivated plots and the tulips which were to discover fresh properties under her watchful gaze. She agreed, however, that now the missionary girl was gone it would be lonely, very lonely, and sighed at the thought of her wasted money.

Sir Walter thought it would be lonely too ; he emphasised matters, and said it would be damnable, then coughed and begged Lady Jane's forgiveness.

But Lady Jane smiled and said, "Oh, that is nothing. You should have heard my brother."

Meanwhile the *Southern Cross*, freed from her tiresome difficulties, throbbed down the coast until she came near the Burlings, and halted to stare at the rocky islands which have acquired so unwholesome a reputation among sailors. Then onward once more, catching glimpses of the distant Sierras, round Cape Roca, and up the Tagus, where for a couple of hours she lay at pause, while her people, hoping to land, wondered at the beauty of gallant old Belim Castle, standing sentinel still at the edge of the river.

But Lisbon has its own ideas of the wisdom of allowing strangers within its gates. It considered that it would be necessary to quarantine so infectious a community. Fever was rife in England, they said ; also the bubonic plague. They would permit the senhors to land, but the sheep, it must go to Quarantina, and the baggage to the Lazaretto. It was the law.

Lady Barraclough said they would much prefer to stay away, and scandalised authority by giving orders to sail at once. She objected to the Lazaretto processes of disinfection ; decided they were antiquated and would ruin their furs ; she would have none of them. So they sailed, and the pilot who had brought them in took his fees for the double journey and went to Quarantina instead. He appeared happy at the prospect. "There was," he said,

"too much time, days, months ; Leesbon would not run away."

Again they faced the sea and raced onward until Gibraltar loomed high and barren in the blue. And here the engineers were given time to "fettle up their mill," as they said, while Lady Barraclough and her party landed to see if the fortress still were British. They stayed to see the monkeys, to dine with the Governor, and hear tattoo, then came down to rejoin their ship, hieing across the scintillating harbour in the small hours.

Lady Barraclough said this was the maddest escapade of all. She considered the navigating problems as child play in comparison with this business of climbing down the slippery steps of a mole, entering a jumping launch, and getting wrapped in wet oilskins for the ordeal of crossing.

She said it reminded her of certain friends of hers, a bishop and his wife, who lived on one side of a river and cured souls on the other. They sailed to and fro daily in a small boat, and sometimes clambered ashore on hands and knees ; but his lordship, fearing a possible chill either to himself or his wife, decided that oilskins were not sufficient, and arranged to carry a second outfit. The boatmen grumbled at this. They said it was one thing to carry a bishop, but they drew the line at two cassocks. One was bad, but two would certainly drown them.

Carragh, however, took the situation philosophically, and thanked the Levanter piping outside, which caused a popple in the harbour ; for with him, securely screened by the drawn-up hood, sat the queen, and the queen's hand sometimes rested in his—a thing quite impossible in calm weather when ten or twelve vigilant persons occupy a launch.

The *Southern Cross*, looking like a fairy palace in the darkness, was waiting and ready to receive them, as also were the officers prowling disconsolate at the loss of their friends. Indeed, Lady Barraclough gathered that the evening spent on board without them had been the slowest on record. "Not even a Limerick," as the irrepressible Toby put it, "to charm away dull care."

And to him went Lady Barraclough's swift rejoinder, "It appears to me, Mr. Slade, that you are more concerned with women just now than with Limericks."

Dawn saw them once more steaming swiftly eastward ; the Levanter whistling and a grey sky cloaking the beauties of the changeful and much-belauded Mediterranean. The Sierras were hidden in smoke-like cloud, the slopes looked bare and arid ; only in the Straits was life, movement ; and there the warships crept in column of line abreast ; some tattered coasters under sail hurried up and down, straining at the leash, and tramps and mail-ships stemmed the rushing sea-horses with the immobility of their kind.

They crossed as far as the Sardinian Spartivento sunless, and found the sea as they had found the bay, the antithesis of their belief. But after the mountainous island was passed, light broke through the clouds, the sky became blue, the water a shimmering lake, subtle with reflection. So they rushed onward until one morning, just as the sun began to shower primrose broadcast upon the dawn, they halted, sniffing a sulphurous mist which rolled across to meet them from Vesuvius.

Naples lay somewhere in that smoke-bank ; Naples with its palaces and its old-world amphitheatre of gorgeous hills, its bay, its islands, its grotto, and its festering pall of smoke. The place of olives and oil and beggars ; of magnificence and squalor ; of trim plaza and unkempt vias of black-eyed men and radiant women ; the home of the priest and the Camorra—all were there, before them, and the navigators were up to gain impressions. First impressions, they said, are so unalterable. For the peace of Naples they had better have remained in bed, for there lay the sulphurous mist, and the sea was yellow, smelling as it always does when the land breeze blows, like a sink.

They moved slowly onward, taking soundings, and grey old St. Elmo stole out of the haze and presented its face for encouragement. Picturesque lateen-rigged fishing-boats, with gorgeous sails and slow movement, appeared one by one and vanished far astern. The crews cheered as they passed. Standing unashamed at the oars and dirtily beautiful, they cried out, "Brava, signores. Eenglish sheep ver good. Bye'm by come again. Hola ! signores." The crew of the English sheep stood stolid and unconcerned at stations.

The smoke began to thin as the sun climbed and got

grip upon it. A pier was seen curving an arm towards them on the northern side of the bay. Houses stole into the air standing on no visible bases ; they ran in terraces upon a sea of mist out of which tall masts and yards and funnels juttred to break the blue-grey banks. A lighthouse with a dimly-flashing lamp grew suddenly on their port hand ; then the gong clanged, and the yacht came to halt as a steam-launch rushed noisily to greet her.

"Good morning, captain. Ah ! the *Southern Cross*. We hardly looked for you yet ; but I have your letters. All well on board ?"

It was the Agent's boat with despatches for the Right Honourable the Earl of Stafferly, and papers and correspondence for the smaller fry in ratio.

CHAPTER XXXI

"I GO TO BERLIN"

"THE modern newspaper," said Lady Barraclough, "is an invention of the devil. It passes my comprehension how sane people can be found willing to read the stuff they print."

"Newspapers, my dear Honoria," Lord Stafferly remarked with his quizzical drawl, "are run by persons seeking pennies, and they do not pretend to pander to the sane."

Lady Barraclough and her friends sat in the drawing-room. Coffee had been served, and the autocrat had been reading an extract; now as her brother finished speaking she folded the page, and leaned forward to say—

"They pander to hysteria; no other explanation suffices."

"A newspaper that did not reckon hysteria among its trade assets would stand a very small chance of acquiring pennies," Sir Walter remarked with his deliberate voice, "and before long we might certainly look for it in the bankruptcy court."

"Hysteria is one of our safeguards," said the President of the Board of Trade with a humorous twinkle. "Don't run it down. It is the tap of office, and in the hands of a healthy editor it works wonders. I hold shares in one of the dailies, and it pays a rattling good dividend now we have hysteria for its watchword. Scandalous? Not at all, Lady Barraclough. The people love humbug. You must give them humbug in these days of semi-education and Board School equality—pure, undiluted humbug. They call it 'fearlessness,' but we know it is 'shouting,' and the clap-trap served up to capture goslings. People

who think they know everything, and yet are ignorant of the first principles of knowledge, must be kept from too much thinking, lest by chance they should stumble on some matter better left to wiser heads. The most effective way to prevent these folk thinking is to turn on the hysteria tap and make them talk of something else. We turn it on like a fire hose, whistle it about, and make a terrible splash. Meanwhile the thing which might have worried us, had it become public property, is safely passed by, and the B.P. have not seen it.

"Editors are my very kind friends—some of them, the others don't count—and if I had my way I would make every editor who knows how to wag the hysteria tap sanely a member of the Upper House. Then," said Sir Thomas, softly, "we should have silenced the B.P., and there would be no fear of the editor changing his coat."

"Good!" said Lord Stafferly. "A most noble argument. Our Constitution requires safeguarding in these days."

"Instead of giving us a lesson on cynicism," Lady Barraclough retorted, "perhaps Sir Thomas will explain the meaning of this new insult."

"Hatherly couldn't explain anything, Honoria," Lord Stafferly cried out. "He is the safest man we have. Knows nothing. Is ready to make inquiries, or, on a pinch, to appoint a commission—Royal for preference. Don't try to get any explanation from Hatherly."

They all laughed, even Lady Barraclough was not proof against this; but her mouth speedily took certain lines, which showed that she, at all events, did not intend to be put off with a joke.

"It is an insult, Stafferly, laugh at it as you will," she reiterated. "Observe, I am requested to go to Berlin to receive the thanks of the German Emperor . . . Sadie! don't go into hysterics, my dear. It is serious—serious."

"If only you had taken my advice, dear Honoria," came from the other side of the drawing-room in Lady Jane's small treble, "we might have been in Sierra Leone or on the Congo, and I— oh, my dear, I am *triste—triste!*"

"Poor ickle sing!" cooed the vivacious Lucy. "Did the diskie-ations upset its pan of campaign and give

it trouble." She rose and put her arms about Lady Jane's waist, and that mild-faced damsel kissed her, and said—

"Yes, truly. I am like Sammy, I could 'cly buccupfuls.'"

There was silence in the drawing-room while the waiters entered to collect the cups and plates. When they had withdrawn the conversation broke out in the old key.

"Say," came from Mrs. Cole's pretty lips, "has any one seen Captain Carragh?"

"When I came in," said Lady Jane, "he was looking at Vesuvius. I heard him sigh."

"Alone?" asked the earl.

"Oh dear no, the poor man had Violet beside him."

"And he was looking at Vesuvius!" quoth Lady Barraclough. "Sorry, dear, but I don't believe you. It is impossible."

"Send for him—send for him," cried Sadie Cole. "This is a business that affects him more directly than any of us."

"Honorias," said Lord Stafferly as he rose and sauntered towards the door, "make Captain Carragh your deputy. The Emperor will understand."

Dinner being over, Carragh had elected to take his cigar on deck, and as a natural consequence Violet Ramsden had remained to smoke a cigarette in his company. Now, however, as Lord Stafferly emerged, the truants entered the drawing-room together, and Carragh crossed over and stood beside the autocrat.

"I have had some funny news, Lady Barraclough," he remarked. "Violet and I have been discussing it, and we think it better to tell you. Your *bête noire*, Harrison has sent me a letter asking, or rather ordering me——"

"I also have heard from Captain Harrison," Lady Barraclough announced. "When I am dead, Captain Harrison's name will be found engraved on my heart—no, it is not a letter. It is a newspaper marked with blue pencil. I have just been reading it."

Carragh looked up. The room generally seemed to be very cognisant of that fact. It appeared to be immensely tickled. Sadie Cole found the atmosphere so infectious that she rose and passed through the doorway.

Her laughter was audible as she joined Lord Stafferly by the rail.

"Come," said Carragh, "evidently our friends don't consider it serious, Lady Barraclough. We give it up. What has Harrison been doing?"

"Look over that paragraph," said Lady Barraclough in tragic tones.

Carragh took the paper, and standing with Violet peeping over his shoulder, read as follows—

"It will be remembered by those of our readers who followed that romantic story of heroism, performed by the ladies who, with Lady Barraclough as their chief, are in command of the *Southern Cross*, that after the details of the case were reported in our columns, a disclaimer was sent in by Lady Barraclough, on the ground that the ship's officers had done the deeds of which they, as a certain M.P. humorously put it, had been accused.

"It will be remembered, too, that we took leave to doubt the authenticity of that disclaimer, but published it as we were bound to do. Now, however, new light falls upon the matter.

"The German Emperor, always one of the first to associate himself with deeds of valour performed at sea, has heard of the wreck, and has been advised by the returned crew, or their owners in Hamburg, of the exact facts. The result, we understand, on the best authority, is that Lady Barraclough and her officers have been asked to go to Berlin to receive the thanks of His Majesty in person, and, it is whispered, to receive recognition in the shape of a Star, or the Order of the Black Eagle.

"This, we think, justifies us in again calling attention to the matter; and we will only add that we are sorry to see our own authorities do not realise the magnitude of the issues at stake, and make some effort to institute an Order for the benefit of the Merchant Service. Perhaps even now it may not be too late, but if it is, we say without reserve that we consider it a disgrace to our system that our sailor heroes should receive decoration at the hands of a foreign nation and be neglected by their own."

Carragh folded the paper and returned it without comment.

The reading had been followed by a tense silence, but Lady Barraclough, of all who heard, seemed to look upon the matter as serious. Violet Ramsden glanced at her and instantly moved to her side. "My poor Honoria!" she cried. "Oh, how I have made you suffer. What shall I do?—what shall I do?"

"Be happy, my dear, and Honoria will forget," came in that lady's ringing tones. "Yes, I look upon you as the one who persuaded me to come this voyage; but I recognise now that had we not come, those concluding words, the only portion of the article I agree with, or with which I have any patience whatever, might never have been penned. They think they are honouring Lady Barraclough with their notices, but I let that pass. Incidentally they are honouring the men who fight these battles daily; men who are out of the reach of wire-pullers, and who do their work without regard to what appears to be the *ultima thule* of all *modern* endeavour—recognition." Then pausing abruptly, with a lighter touch she added, "Captain Carragh, I am in your hands. What must I do?"

Carragh looked up swiftly; he was about to thank her for those kindly words, but catching a hint of her desire, said instead, "Did Harrison send it? Are you sure it is from him?"

"Sure? Look, here is his letter telling me it is sent 'because he fancies I shall like to follow the course of events as they appear in the papers.'"

"Capital press-cutting agency he would make, eh, Hatherly?" said Sir Walter, breaking the rather long pause that ensued.

"Unfailing."

"Oh, but it was done kindly," the commander put in; "for, as I said, I too have had a letter from Harrison, and in it I have some very stringent orders."

"Orders!" Sir Walter bristled. "They can't give you orders, my boy. You have resigned."

"My resignation does not take effect until I return," Carragh answered. "So, unless I am prepared to face all sorts of penalties, I shall have to go."

"Go!—good gracious! Where are you ordered?" Lady Barraclough cried.

"To Berlin, to see the German Emperor, Lady Barra-

clough," Carragh laughed; "and, for the Company's sake, I am asked to kow-tow and——"

"Oh, but this is absurd," quoth Sir Walter, but this time with laughter in his eyes.

"Then that man knew he was guying me," Lady Barraclough announced grimly. "Show me your letter, sir."

"By all means. Here it is. You will see that he trusted to my news being spread first. He says so. He sent the paper to show you what vivid imaginations they have at home. He says he is doubled with laughing at the editorial *volle face* which seems imminent. Poor old Harrison!"

"I think you are forgetting that the laugh is at my expense, Captain Carragh," Lady Barraclough ejaculated seriously.

"And at mine," chimed Miss Violet with a merry twinkle. "Oh, but we forgive you—don't we, Honoria?"

Lady Barraclough looked up from the letter.

"Of course . . . of course. Don't we always forgive mankind?"

Lord Stafferly appeared in the doorway at this juncture, with Mrs. Cole, brilliant in silks and chiffon, beside him.

"Well," he said. "What do you propose to do? Going to prosecute the editor, or Harrison—or going to eat humble pie?"

"I shall do neither, Stafferly. I shall go to Berlin and see the Emperor. Captain Carragh and Violet will go also. That, of course, is a *sine quâ non*. Sir Walter, what do you intend to do?"

"You put it so very pointedly, my dear lady," he returned, "that I can scarcely refuse. Yes—on the whole, I think I should like to see Berlin again. You come, Stafferly?"

"Spare me!" said the earl. "Unnecessary travelling is not my *forte*. I am very comfortable. Think we will stay here—eh, Hatherly?"

"By all means. If we were *incog.*, now . . . but we are not, and we must be careful not to mar the peace of Europe."

"Diplomatic visits are so upsetting," Lady Barraclough remarked in her most cynical manner. "No, we must

not furnish your papers with further copy—nor the B.P. with further thrills.”

“What a plague a name is!” sighed Lord Stafferly. But he appeared heartily glad of the excuse.

“One might as well be born a brand of soap,” said Sir Thomas.

“To be born without one is worse,” said Mrs. Cole demurely. Whereat every one laughed. But she alluded to the name, and not to the soap.

CHAPTER XXXII

HEY FOR ENGLAND !

TOBY SLADE looked up from the small round table in the place of hard wood seats and tippie ; before him was a paper of verse, on his lap the banjo. He took the latter in hand, and, thrumming in a solemn minor key, said, " How's this, Strings ? " and broke into song—

" On Naples when the sun was low
There came to us a tremie blow,
And dark as Hades grew the show—
For Elsie's gone to Shermany."

" Eh, what d'you think of it ? Does it jingle ?—is it rhythmic ? " He leaned back in his chair with one eye closed, regarding his companion with a critical air.

The purser removed his pipe. " I haff no tesire to criticize," he said. " I am not a boet—andt, I am not in loff—hein ? "

" Can't get on, eh ? Poor old Strings ! " said the incorrigible. " Well, here's another—last verse, dear boy," and again he struck the notes and sang :—

" But Naples waits another sight,
When the cock crows to end this night,
Telling the sun our world to light—
When Elsie's back from Shermany."

" How's that, eh ? Strike you as suitable ? "

" You are a boet," said the purser ; " you are alzo in loff. If in loff you long enough remain, you will the light of our Heine dowze—soh ! Vere's Valton ? "

" On deck, looking for Helen's train. Guess it ought to be somewhere about St. Gothard by this—coming through

the tunnel, perhaps, and after "but there's Milan and Rome and . . . poor old Winton!"

"Here Blaise, here Eileen, here entrepreneur!" sighed the purser. "Here's Better Lewis?"

"Talking to Lady Jane."

"The man and the dupe?"

"Same old lady—turns her eyes up at you and looks—
you know, eh, Strings?"

"I do," said Strings, and he sighed. Then he tipped off the remains of a whisky-and-seltzer, adding, in a sepulchral whisper—

"I'm going to turn in."

Toby Slade glanced up in surprise and said—

"Have a drink and doze, old chap?"

"Zanks—no. I keep my bowder bowl."

"Ah!" said the fourth officer as the other departed, "then he must be bad. Poor old Strings! Wonder which one it is this time?" He sat entranced for a minute, then taking up the banjo, picked the notes gingerly and sang—

"O Phosphore redde diem,
Cur nostram gaudiam moraris?
Elsie venturam esse . . . eh?"

"Dalk zense!" said the purser, putting in his head a moment to exprolulate.

"I will," said Toby Slade. Listen. And again he sang—

"Here will I pledge thee, swan-like child,
While Vesuvius kindly draws it mild;
In the silence of the hill-top,
Careful lest we come a big plop—
Fare thee well sweet Mig-no-nette,
Lift thy lips and take a kisse."

"That's not half bad," said Toby Slade to the empty chairs. "It ought to fetch a cast-iron stocking, let alone a blue."

But the purser had disappeared. The smoking-room was empty. Toby Slade twanged the banjo without encouragement; looked at the carved oaken panels, the *café chantant* tables, and discovered also an empty glass.

"Sentiment, by Jove!" he remarked with a tragic gesture, and turned to touch the bell. "Heigho!" he

added as an afterthought, "this is a sad world—methinks I'm melancholy.

"O Morning Star, bring back the day,
Why do you delay our joys?
Elsie is about to come . . ."

His servant appeared. "Yes-sir," he remarked.

Toby Slade pointed to his glass.

"Same old mixture, Marshall," he said, with an air of untold despondence.

Marshall grinned and found it. He set it down carefully on its little silver tray, flicked a cigar ash from the table, and withdrew. Then Toby Slade took the glass and held it high.

"Elsie has been gone a week," he announced solemnly. "We have been smelling Vesuvius during the same space. It's getting monotonous. Same old smell. Vile. Here's to her safe return—to-morrow."

He drained the mixture and set the glass down with a crash. "Highland honours, by Jove!" he said.

From outside came the Neapolitan war chant—"Funicula, funicule," the singers crooned to the lilt of guitars and zithers as they cruised slowly round the ship in their gondola, seeking gold and thankful for pennies. The song rolled across a spangled bay. Vesuvius belched fire and smoke into the clouds. The city lay in tiers, all lighted by tiny specks of flame—but no one heeded either the singers or their fairy city.

The *Southern Crossites* prayed again—"O Phosphore redde diem!"

The morning came, and with it the train, which apparently had found no difficulty either at St. Gothard, Milan, Rome, or any other place of dreadful stoppage; it halted quite calmly at the platform, and Lady Barraclough alighted and repaired at once to the yacht.

Her party had been swelled, to the grief of the officers, as has been seen, by Helen Granger and Elsie Collins; now, however, they were all again in Naples, and mutual smiles and congratulations testified to their joy at reunion.

"It has been delightful," said Miss Elsie, shaking Toby Slade's hand.

"For a week I have been dead, Miss Collins," that versatile young man asserted. "But now I live."

"If we can't navigate, Mr. Slade, it is evident we can doctor," Elsie laughed.

"We? You," Slade corrected. "The others, perhaps . . . but my complaint requires only one physician—Miss Elsie."

They passed down the deck throwing glances.

"It has been *triste—triste!*" sighed Lady Jane as she embraced her friend. "*Except* for your brother and Mrs. Cole," she added with a side glance at the earl and the fair American.

"Poor Stafferly!" said Lady Barraclough. "Yes, dear, I have heard. He wrote—and I think we must return at once. No, I am not vexed. She is a sweet woman—but, oh, my dear! think of my responsibility. I brought all this about—I, Honoria, Lady Barraclough, as they call me, who am known as a man-hater; a person with a broom; the head of the League for the Emancipation of Women—and . . . it is terrible. I can think of nothing else. Nothing. It unnerves me. Remember the catalogue—Captain Carragh and Violet; to see them together one would imagine they had been separated all the week; and yet, if you believe me, it was almost more than the British Embassy and German Court etiquette could accomplish to take her away from him during the interview. I tremble for our nationality—but look beyond. You saw Toby Slade and the fair Elsie—I persuaded her to join us on purpose to break the spell—and what is the result? At this moment I am assured they are billing and cooing behind some self-righteous boat. Then there is Stafferly and Mrs. Cole. I foresaw that also—but I was unable to alter events; Stafferly desired to come. And now a hint has fallen to me that Walton and Helen Granger are in love, and my maid was disconsolate because I absolutely forbade Carragh to take his servant with him. Sammy, if you please—a man with a tail! She cried—blubbered is the more correct term—and informed me that she loved him; that he had cheeks like blancmange and lips like raspberries—as though a blancmange and raspberry complexion have anything to do with a man's ability to provide for his wife. Indeed, she was on the point of giving me notice—me, Jane—when I advertised the fact that a person with a tail would probably be the father of tailed children. That sobered her."

"Oh, but it is a list. A terrible list—what can I do to break the sequence of events? Obviously we must return. Jane, I am sad—sad. I was so concerned with Carragh and Violet. I knew their people, and have held them both as babies in my arms. I saw an *affaire du cœur*, and in my anxiety to aid it I fear I have neglected my duty to others. But I had an excuse. There is only one justification for marriage. I hold to that very firmly—only one; and as there are more matches made on earth than ever were made in heaven—when I see a heaven-born instance before me, I try how I may help it to its consummation."

"But, my dear Honoria," Lady Jane expostulated, "surely you consider your brother's and Sadie's *une affaire du cœur*?"

"In a sense, yes. But Stafferly is not a boy—and I must credit Sadie with a tinge of modernity."

"We are free agents, *dégagé*," said Lady Jane. "You can't expect us to wait in all cases for what you call a heaven-born instance."

"You too?" Lady Barraclough returned with a note of sadness.

"It is a woman's province to marry," Lady Jane remarked with drooping lids; "it is the *raison d'être* of the sex," she added with a sigh.

Lady Barraclough glanced sharply at her friend. "I thought that the propagation of tulips was your life-scheme?" she said.

"As to that," Lady Jane returned with a fine disregard for the tone of her reply, "one is permitted to vary one's opinion with time."

The little lady turned away with an air of supreme detachment, and passed to a new group of friends by the rail.

"It is a fresh light," said Lady Barraclough softly as she went to find her brother. "I wonder . . . oh, I wonder whether I have been blind?"

On the forward end of the promenade Carragh and Violet stood to receive the homage of their fellows.

"It was delightful," Miss Violet said. "I am quite in love with the Kaiser. He was so kind. Gave us *all* an audience, and was so amused when he heard that I was one of the navigators of whom the papers had spoken. I

believe he called us to Berlin and adopted the line he did, just to find out whether there *were* any lady officers; for he follows English affairs with great zest—especially in nautical matters.

"Of course," she continued, "we discovered a great deal of this at the Embassy. But they would not allow us to be present at the investiture. Paddy tells me it was grand. I am sure it must have been. I wish I could have seen."

"You are a lucky man, Carragh," said Lord Stafferly. "By Jove, I'm half inclined to envy you."

"If all I hear is true, Lord Stafferly, you have no right to envy any one."

"Hear that, Sadie?" laughed the earl. "Another certificate, you see."

"Did I require one, my lord?" asked Sadie Cole with a delightful smile.

"Is it quite fair to tempt a man in that fashion—and in a crowd?" asked his lordship.

"To the fair all things are fair," cried Sadie merrily.

And into the pause came Lady Barraclough's ringing voice as she pressed forward holding out her hands.

"Congratulations, my dear," she said, "congratulations to you too, Stafferly. I pray you may be very happy. . . . Oh! but where is it to end?"

"St. George's, Hanover Square, if the fates permit us to reach home," Lord Stafferly announced gravely.

"St. George's will not be large enough if our engagements multiply at this pace," Lady Barraclough smiled; then with her more serious voice, "Stafferly, will you give me a word?"

She drew him aside and taking his arm, said—

"We must return—at once. I want your help."

"Return?—why? I have ten days before me yet—ten days."

"My dear brother, it is serious. Have you noticed Jane?"

"Good gracious! no. Why?"

"She is in love."

"Nonsense."

"I am certain. She has thrown the tulip theory overboard."

Lord Stafferly looked into his sister's face, but he did not speak.

"She tells me, 'It is a woman's province to marry.' She!"

"Ah!" said Lord Stafferly, "then it is serious. Oh, this is very awkward."

"I dare not risk further entanglements—pardon the phrase, dear, in her case it would be—and I could not meet de Bleach and her father again if . . . Why, suppose she took a fancy to the bo'sun, or the man with conscientious scruples! You know what she is. There would be a run-away match and a scandal. I dare not contemplate it."

"One minute, Honoria. Let us look at this thing calmly. First, she is too old, and second——"

"A woman without mental balance is never too old for love," said Lady Barraclough crisply. "We have known cases. No, you must help me. There is no other way."

"Hatherly will be disappointed. It will break into our plans abominably. Hang Lady Jane!"

"No, my dear, you can't do that."

"I know, I know. Why, Honoria, where's your sense of humour?"

"I have none. I am a woman. And at the present moment Jane weighs on me like the old man on Sinbad. Come, you will help me?"

"If I could see any other way I should be inclined to try it, but I don't. No. I am sorry, though. We were just beginning to enjoy ourselves."

"I, too, am sorry. Stafferly, your despatches must be very weighty to-night."

"They shall be weighty," said her brother.

And so it came about that, just as little Lady Jane was commencing to forget the tulips and gathering in the strands of the drama of life, Lord Stafferly announced that, much to his regret, urgent public business called him home, and he would be compelled to leave them and travel overland.

The suggestion fell like a bomb in the place of lavender and frills that night after dinner, and to it both Sadie and Violet put in a request to know when it would be necessary for him to be in London; and the earl with a dry smile said, "A week."

"Then," said Miss Ramsden, "I propose we all return together by sea." "And I second it," said Mrs. Cole. Whereupon, there being apparently but one bewildered

dissentient, Lady Barraclough announced the resolution passed.

At this Lady Jane found breath to ask why they were compelled to return, and what was the important business—seeing the House would not meet for a month or perhaps more; and Lord Stafferly, put on his metal for a reply, expatiated.

“You see,” he said, “we are changing our tactics. Measures, at one time considered across the floor of the House, are now banged in the presence of the great B.P. Apparently the people consider it their due; and, in any case, it has been advocated by some authorities so loudly, that we can only mark time, in a sense, and await the issue. We thought we were to escape anything very noteworthy in this way this year; but it appears that directly Parliament rose, our friends commenced to stump the country, make declamatory speeches, rouse public opinion, and flourish impossible chairs at the Treasury Bench.

“We have a measure before us which had, I supposed, lost all power, which would not turn the hair of our most pronounced opponents, but I was wrongly advised. This bill is to come before us in the Upper House, and we shall throw it out as we have thrown it out before. So the Opposition is promenading the land to denounce the Gilded Chamber, and we must get back to defend our cloth. It is a leaf out of the book of the New Diplomacy—it is very wearying, very annoying, but extremely effectual.”

He leaned on the elbows of his chair, looking sadly at his companions, obviously sorry to mar their pleasure; and to him Lady Jane turned with a temerity that astonished even her small self.

“May I ask,” she said, “what is the subject of the Bill?”

And the earl, still resting on his elbows, said, gravely—

“The Deceased Wife’s Sister Bill.”

“Then go home and defeat them,” said Lady Jane. For, as it happened, of all the bills before a long-suffering House, this was the one of supreme merit in the eyes of little Jane Vereker-Tayler. “I sacrifice all to such a cause,” she declared with a final and impressive outbreak.

Whereupon there came a silence which might have been heard—at least, Sir Walter Carragh gave it as his opinion

that it might. "Another proof, if one were needed," so said Mrs. Cole, "of the origin of his species."

They dined that night at half-past eight; smoked, danced, listened to the Neapolitan war chant, and stared at the grey volcano sending red-hot breath to stain the clouds; then they slept, and at ten the next morning, when the smoke no longer lay across the wonderful landscape, steamed straight for the gates of the sea.

And the sea smiled upon them, blue, dancing in the sunlight, painting shadows under the hills, until again they met the wide Atlantic rollers, and dipped gravely in a swell that broke smooth and oily on Spanish rocks.

It is indescribably beautiful, this march up the coastline of Spain and Portugal; and to the people travelling it, a reminder of those fair white cliffs they will presently reach—the thrill of home. In fine weather it is a series of ever-changing pictures; headlands, capes, lighthouses, shipping, all vividly coloured with strong blues and yellows; the crisp hiss of the bow wave drawing the only line of white; but when the Atlantic frowns, the oily, heaving swell becomes a roaring mountain, a torrent foaming at the crest and advancing with arms held out to strike; the sea runs in frothy patches, green, white, black; the sky is of grey—an immense dome, wind-swept, crammed with charging clouds, rain, hail, sleet, through which the white sea-birds circle on steady wing with eyes monotonously searching the wake. But in these conditions the headlands are veiled in the damp, grey mist, and the only sign of life, apart from the birds, is to be found in the grey smoke-clouds of passing steamers—that endless procession of leaping iron and steel, hurrying always to and from England with food and wealth for the British nation.

Up the coast—past St. Vincent, catching a glimpse of Sagres, Guia, and staring hard once more at purple Roca, the *Southern Cross* moved with the regularity of all driven things, without pause—a machine obeying the lord who fashioned it. Up, up, catching glimpses of lateen-winged fishing-craft, black-sailed coasters, and the grey-coated liners hurrying south; past Oporto, Vigo, hugging the coast in gleaming sunshine to gather impressions for after-years, and so, into the bay—the yacht solemn, impassive; the people radiant, sparkling.

To some of those who trod her decks the *Southern Cross*

appeared to crawl ; to others she flew. Lady Barraclough was of the former opinion, Lady Jane of the latter. But mankind mercifully did not speak ; having, if one may whisper it, no notion that he was desired to speak. Lady Jane sighed, and said it was most romantic ; Lady Barraclough frowned and prayed mankind might continue blind—and in this instance, at all events, there seems to be some evidence that the prayers were answered. Peter Lovatt remained untouched ; but, on the other hand, it may have been the dumpling shape.

Among this gentleman's characteristics were several his brother-officers dubbed foolishness. He had, so they said, the faculty of never understanding a hint, never reading from the eyes, and never hearing quavers in the voice. But behind this notable density was an acute perception. Peter Lovatt intended to be a commander, to wear the oak-leaf and leave Azimuths to his juniors ; and, being something of a mathematician, he had worked out the percentage of married officers who attained command in the Oceanic. He found that they might be represented by the symbol x . Marriage to the second officer, therefore, was taboo. He would have nothing to do with it—even at the price of a rather erratic title. Again, he had some regard for the wishes of the marine superintendent ; and if that gentleman had offered him his choice between the latest addition to the Fleet plus a thousand a year, and a wife plus a similar amount, he would have accepted the ship unhesitatingly.

These are rare qualifications, at all events in the Merchant Service. How they may happen to fit in with our kindred in the Navy is another question ; but when they were reported to Harrison, he declared at once that they were qualifications which would land Peter Lovatt at the top of the tree.

"For is there," he asked plaintively of Lady Barraclough when the matter came before him, "any one thing more distracting to the commander of a mailship, than to sit at table and consider which of all the beautiful women placed under his personal care by confiding strangers, was the most beautiful, which the most accomplished, and which the most desirable as a wife ?"

And Lady Barraclough, looking Captain Harrison very firmly in the face, said, "Yes, there is one thing."

And when Harrison, blinking behind gold-rimmed spectacles, ventured the query, "Which?" she turned on him like a hawk and said, "The consideration as to which of them has the most money."

"A nasty one, Lady Barraclough, a very nasty one," Harrison wriggled under the lash. "But I fear it is not undeserved."

There were wedding bells at more than one church as a result of the lady navigators' experiment. Lord Stafferly and Sadie Cole, as was foreshadowed, at St. George's, Hanover Square; Carragh and Violet Ramsden from Lady Barraclough's place in Surrey. For this was her expiation. It had come, by degrees, to be her one desire to join the hands chance and the mutability of human endeavour had put in her way. There were engagements, too, but as a truthful historian, it is impossible to predicate more. They may result, as Harrison stated, in depopulating the *Southern Cross*; or they may result in broken hearts on the bridge when whole hearts and steady brains are very necessary—but of that who shall speak?

And so this story, which began in war, with a vast bustle and hustling of mankind, with the ringing of solely feminine aspirations, ends to the music of the two—man and woman combined; or, if it please you better, woman and man. Place the formula how you will; add to it, subtract from it with your vagaries of diction; let which suits you take the lead—woman or man, man or woman; it is nothing to the scheme of things, the cosmos from which humanity was evolved. For the stronger will always lead.

How Lady Barraclough looked upon it may be gathered from her phrase as she shook hands with Carragh and kissed her dear girl's cheek in the vestry of the old Norman Church that had seen them wedded—it tells, too, how she looked upon herself.

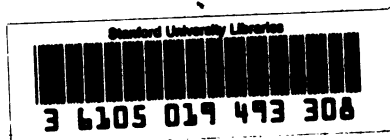
"In spite of my beginnings; in spite of my too evident bias, I have marched to champion mankind. My dears, God give you happiness!"

And there were tears behind the ringing sentence.

THE END

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